The Five People You Meet in Heaven

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MITCH ALBOM

Mitch Albom was born to a middle class suburban American family, and was the middle child of three and attended Brandeis University. Though he initially dreamed of becoming a professional piano player, and in fact supported himself after college as a part-time piano player in New York, he soon became interested in journalism and began freelancing as a sports reporter. He eventually attended the Journalism School at Columbia University. After Columbia, he worked his way up in sports journalism, winning prestigious awards from the Associated Press in 1985, and eventually landed as the lead sports columnist at the Detroit Free Press. Albom also wrote a number of sports books, but his big success occurred in 1995 when he learned that a professor of his from Brandeis, Morrie Schwartz, was dying of ALS. Albom visited Schwartz multiple times in Boston, and wrote a book about the experience, *Tuesdays with Morrie*. The advance for the book allowed Albom to pay Schwartz's medical bills, but what was expected to be a modest publishing run turned into a phenomenon, as *Tuesdays with Morrie* spent 205 weeks on the bestseller list. Albom followed up Tuesdays with Morrie six years later with the novel and smash success *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* in 2003. Since then, he has also written *For One More Day* (2006), *Have a Little Faith* (2009), and *The Time Keeper* (2012). His books are known for their inspirational themes, and have been featured on many news and talk shows. Albom is also an accomplished musician and songwriter. He lives in Detroit with his wife, Janine Sabino.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novels spans the 20th century, encompassing events from the late Industrial Revolution to the cultural shifts surrounding World War II. The novel briefly depicts the struggle of immigrants during the late Industrial Revolution through the Blue Man. The Blue Man, the "Circus Freak" from Eddie's childhood, tells the story of how he and his parents emigrated from Poland at the turn of the century, and who was forced to work in a dangerous factory alongside his father. Eddie, the novel's protagonist, is born to a working class family during the Great Depression. The poverty prevalent during that era characterizes Eddie's childhood, adding to a sense of scarcity and hopelessness that follows him throughout his life. As a young man, Eddie feels society's obsessions with contributing to the war effort, and he voluntarily enlists in World War II. Eddie's lifelong depression and anxiety depict the experience of American veterans, particularly in an era before post-traumatic stress and other mental health issues were openly discussed. After Eddie returns from World War II, the novel turns inward to focus on Eddie's inner struggles, and his connection to world events appears to diminish. Though the novel spans several more decades up to the 1990's, no mention is made of the changing politics, social values or pop culture that take place during those eras.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While the modern genre of Inspirational/Religious fiction is believed to have began in the 1950's with an increase in religiously infused novels, the genre of Inspirational fiction became popularized in the late 1970's and 80's, with faith-based authors like Janette Oke. Later adapted to Hallmark movies, Oke's *Love Comes Softly* (1979-1989) series featured the stories of frontier women learning to use their religious devotion and connections to others to cope with life's struggles and find hope. Through authors like Oke, the Inspirational/ Religious genre came to develop a distinct theme of coping with suffering through faith and seeking new beginnings through the assistance of a higher power. In the early 1990's, the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* (1993-present) series, further characterized the genre by focusing on anecdotes of suffering, loss, and rediscovery of love/ faith/ happiness to create positive, therapeutic reactions in readers. Mitch Albom is considered to be one of the most important figures in modern Inspirational fiction, due to the mainstream popularity of his prolific work. His first best-selling novel, *Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997), is a memoir about his meetings with his dying former professor. Like *Five People*, the novel focuses on lessons of love, compassion, forgiveness, and human connection, and the meaning of life in the face of death. With *Five People*, Albom introduced the theme of life after death and delved further into Christian themes. His novels, *For One More Day* (2006) and *Have a Little Faith* (2009) returned to the themes of redemption and religious lessons around the meaning of life and death. Five People has also been compared to *Can't Wait to Get to Heaven* (2007), the novel by Fannie Flagg. Though considered a mystery-comedy, Flagg's novel similarly portrays an elderly woman who has died and gone to heaven, and her adventures and reflections as she reflects on her life and observes the effects she had on others. Albom's works have also been compared to Nicholas Sparks, the author of *The Notebook*, who focuses more on romance but uses a similarly accessible style to portray stories of hope and triumph over impossible obstacles. In *The Notebook*, Sparks similarly uses the reflections of an elderly couple as the vantage point for a seemingly impossible love story, illustrating how love, devotion and forgiveness create meaning in life. In his novel *Safe Haven*,

Sparks uses the theme of faith to tell the story of a woman who escapes an abusive relationship to begin a new life elsewhere, and who finds a new family with the help of a woman who has died.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*
- **Where Written:** Detroit, United States
- **When Published:** 2003
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Fiction
- **Genre:** Religious Fiction, Philosophical Fiction
- **Setting:** Fictional seaside amusement park in an unnamed town
- **Climax:** When Eddie realizes that the shadow he saw in the flaming hut during the war really was the little girl, Tala, and that he killed her.
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Ruby Pier's Inspiration: Ruby Pier, the setting of *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, was inspired by the beach town amusement parks in California, particularly the Santa Monica Pier.

Eddie's Inspiration: The character of Eddie was inspired by Mitch Albom's uncle Eddie, who was a working class World War II veteran.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins with a countdown to the death of Eddie, a crippled, elderly man who works in maintenance at Ruby Pier, a seaside amusement park. Eddie has always wanted to leave Ruby Pier to make a life for himself elsewhere, but has never been able to. While making his ordinary rounds one day, Eddie sees a cart on a ride called "Freddy's Free Fall" hanging and threating to dump out the ride-goers. Eddie quickly helps other workers get the people out, but then he notices that the cart is still falling—while a little girl, "Amy or Annie," stands below. Eddie goes to save her, and dies when the cart falls on him.

Eddie goes to heaven, where he travels through many shifting colors until he meets the Blue Man, who was one of the "circus freaks" at Ruby Pier long ago. The Blue Man tells Eddie that in heaven, he will meet five important people who will each teach him a lesson about his life. The Blue Man explains that he turned blue as a child from medicinal silver nitrate, and led a lonely life thereafter. He explains that he died because of Eddie: when Eddie was a child, he once ran into the road after a lost ball, and the Blue Man had a heart attack after swerving to avoid hitting him. The Blue Man teaches Eddie the lesson of human connection—that all lives are connected, even those of strangers.

Eddie again travels through the colors, and then arrives in a familiar jungle battleground. There, he meets the Captain. The novel flashes back to Eddie's youth, when he decides to enlist in World War II to prove his bravery. Stationed in the Philippines, Eddie and his unit are taken captive by enemy. Months later, they plan and execute an escape. While setting the village on fire, Eddie thinks he sees a small shadow moving in one of the huts, and tries to save the person. He is then shot in the leg and knocked unconscious. He comes home permanently crippled and bitter. In heaven, the Captain reveals that it was he who shot Eddie, trying to get him out of the fire. He also reveals that he died during the escape while trying to get his men out. Before leaving him, the Captain teaches Eddie that sacrifice is vital to life, and should be sought after rather than lamented.

Eddie travels again, and lands outside of a diner in the mountains, where he sees his father in the window. The novel flashes back to Eddie's childhood, during which he grows up trying to win the love of his physically abusive, emotionally neglectful father. In heaven, a woman named Ruby appears, and tells Eddie that her husband, Emile, built Ruby Pier in her honor long ago. The first Ruby Pier burned down, ruining Emile's spirit and wealth. Emile was then in the hospital next to Eddie's father, who was dying. Ruby explains that Eddie's father died saving his friend Mickey Shea from drowning in an ocean storm, even though he had just caught Mickey trying to rape Eddie's mother. Ruby teaches Eddie the lesson of forgiveness, and Eddie lets go of his anger toward his father.

Next, Eddie finds himself in a world of weddings, where he finds his wife, Marguerite. The novel flashes back to Eddie's life with Marguerite, from their courtship at Ruby Pier, to their humble wedding, to their attempts to have children. Eddie ruined their chances of adopting a child, after Marguerite got into a devastating car accident while trying to stop Eddie from gambling away all their money on his birthday. Margeurite eventually forgave him, but soon afterward she died from a brain tumor. Eddie is left feeling empty, as Marguerite had always been the primary source of his happiness in life, and she had given him the strength to fight through the darkness that consumed him after the war. In heaven, Marguerite spends a long time with Eddie. She teaches him that love transcends death.

The novel flashes back through Eddie's birthdays after Marguerite dies, all of which are lonely and uneventful. Eddie spends his last years missing Marguerite and regretting that he never left Ruby Pier to make a life for himself elsewhere. He believes that his life was meaningless.

In heaven, the last person Eddie meets is a little girl named Tala. She reveals that she was killed at Eddie's hands during the war—she was the small shadow Eddie saw moving in the

flaming hut. Eddie falls into a deep despair, now believing that he deserved the darkness he felt all of his life. Tala then explains to Eddie that he redeemed himself, by keeping children safe through his maintenance job at Ruby Pier. Eddie finds peace, and travels through heaven until he reaches a Ferris wheel in the sky, where Marguerite awaits him.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Eddie – The novel's protagonist, a lonely, elderly man who has spent his life working in maintenance at Ruby Pier, an amusement park by the ocean. Eddie is from a working-class family of Romanian origin, and he is tough, hardworking, and concerned about the well-being of others. Abused by his father throughout his youth, Eddie learns to keep his emotions inside. As a young man, he works at Ruby Pier with his father to save up to study engineering elsewhere. When WWII begins, however, Eddie enlists to prove his masculinity, and is sent to an island in the Philippines. When he returns, he marries his sweetheart, Marguerite. After the war, Eddie spends the rest of his life fighting depression. His depression worsens as everyone he loves dies before him. At the beginning of the novel, Eddie dies and begins a journey through heaven, where he travels through endless colors, and meets five important people who will each teach him a lesson.

Eddie's Father – Eddie's father (whose name is never given) is the darkest character in the novel. A violent, misogynistic alcoholic who works a low-paying job as the head of maintenance at Ruby Pier, he neglects and physically abuses Eddie and his brother Joe throughout their childhoods. As a child, Eddie tries to win over his love, but his attempts are never met with anything but a total lack of affection from his father. The only times Eddie's father shows any interest in his son is when Eddie wins fights, baseball games, or fixes equipment at the maintenance shop. Eddie's father dies from pneumonia, which he caught while saving his friend Mickey Shea during an ocean storm. He represents extreme male aggression and toughness.

Eddie's Mother – A gentle, comforting, stay-at-home mother devoted to her children and to Eddie's father. She often tries to stop her husband and other men from violent and destructive behavior, but is usually helpless against it. She is always interested in Eddie's life, and especially in his courtship with Marguerite. She refuses to leave her husband's bedside during his illness. When he dies, she becomes delusional and continues to believe he is alive. Eddie's mother has only loving and positive traits, and thereby represents an angelic female ideal, opposite to her husband.

Marguerite – Eddie's only love interest, a sunny and energetic woman. Like Eddie's mother, she is kind and gentle, and preoccupied mainly with her husband and having children. However, in contrast with Eddie's mother, Marguerite exerts her wishes somewhat more freely. While Eddie dreams of greatness away from Ruby Pier, Marguerite makes the best of their situation in the present. Her primary goal is to have children, but she is infertile. Her attempt to arrange an adoption fails when she gets into a car accident that drains their financial resources. Marguerite is the central source of Eddie's happiness, and his life plunges when she dies of brain cancer at the age of 47. In heaven, she takes Eddie to a heaven full of weddings, where she teaches him that true love never dies.

Joe – Eddie's older brother. During their childhood, Eddie has to fight bullies for him because Joe doesn't like to fight. As teenagers, Joe resists their father's pressure to work at Ruby Pier, and instead works at the town swimming pool. Joe is a disappointment to their father, who thinks of him as unmanly. Joe mostly fades from the story after he and Eddie grow up, except for rare visits and calls that leave Eddie feeling jealous. Joe becomes a salesman and makes good money. He buys a condo in Florida and plans to retire, but then dies from a heart attack.

Mickey Shea – An alcoholic Irishman, the longtime close friend of Eddies' mother and father. Mickey is impulsive, festive, and lonely. Mickey helps Eddie's father get his job at Ruby Pier, and when Eddie is born, he gives his parents money for their financial struggles. He is affectionate with Eddie, though often too rough. Mickey's lowest point is when he loses his job, gets drunk, and tries to rape Eddie's mother. Eddie's father chases him down to kill him, but when he sees Mickey falling into the ocean and drowning, he saves him instead. Mickey dies alone and drunk, overwhelmed by guilt for his actions.

Dominguez – A young, cheerful man who works with Eddie in maintenance at Ruby Pier. He and his wife's families are from Mexico, where many of their relatives still live. Eddie and Dominguez have a warm relationship, and after Eddie dies, he is the only person there to take care of Eddie's arrangements. Dominguez becomes the new Head of Maintenance in Eddie's place.

"Amy or Annie" – A little girl whom Eddie has spoken to a few times at Ruby Pier, and who calls him "Eddie Maint'nance." Eddie dies saving this little girl, whose name he can't remember. When he sees her under the collapsing ride, he runs to push her out of the way. All through heaven, Eddie asks everyone if he succeeding in saving her. After Eddie's journey through heaven, he waits in heaven to become one of the five people who will one day teach "Amy or Annie" a lesson about her life.

Nicky – Mentioned only briefly, a teenage boy who frequently visits Ruby Pier. Nicky turns out to be the grandson of Ruby, for whom the amusement park was named. Nicky loses his car key on the ride "Freddy's Free Fall" a few weeks before Eddie dies. It is the key that falls into the gears and causes the ride to

break, setting off the series of events that leads to Eddie's death. Nicky never learns about this connection.

The Blue Man – A member of the human "freak show" at Ruby Pier during Eddie's childhood, and one of the five people Eddie meets in heaven. He is an anxious, lonely, and forgiving man. Born Joseph Corvelzchik, his first memory is his mother lifting him over the ocean as they emigrated from Poland. As a small child, his parents forced him to work in a sweatshop out of economic desperation. He was then given silver nitrate for his nerves, which turned his skin the color blue. Shunned by society, he was invited to join a traveling circus. After years of traveling, he settled permanently at Ruby Pier, where he found community and a sense of home. He died from a heart attack, caused by the shock from a young Eddie running into the street after a lost ball on his birthday. The Blue Man teaches Eddie that all lives are connected, even strangers.

The Captain – The leader of Eddie's unit in the Philippines during WWII. Born into a military family during wartime, battle is at the center of the Captain's life. The Captain is intelligent and sensible, and does everything he can to keep his unit alive during the war. While escaping captivity, the Captain shoots Eddie in the leg because he believes it is the only way he can get Eddie to leave with them. During the escape the Captain is trying to clear a path for his unit to get out, and he is killed by a landmine. In heaven, the Captain teaches Eddie that sacrifice isn't the same as loss, but rather that it connects humans to one another and gives meaning to life.

Rabozzo – One of the men in Eddie's unit during the war. After the members of the unit are kidnapped by the enemy and forced to work in a coalmine, Rabozzo "keeps a poker face" during the days of their captivity, but screams at night. He catches a fever while working in the mine, and when he falls out of weakness, Crazy Two shoots him in front of everyone. To Eddie, Rabozzo's death signifies the meaninglessness and darkness of the war.

Crazies One, Two, Three and Four – The neurotic, desperate Filipino soldiers who kidnap Eddie and his unit during the war. As malnourished as Eddie and his men, the "Crazies" keep the unit for several months, eventually planning to work them to death in the mines. "Crazy Two" pitilessly kills the feverish Rabozzo in front of the rest of the unit. By distracting the "Crazies" with a game of juggling coal, Eddie leads his unit in a plot to kill all of their captors and escape.

Ruby – The third person Eddie meets in heaven, the woman for whom the first version of Ruby Pier was named. She is graceful, competent, and smart. Like the other women in the novel, she dedicates herself to caring for others: her husband Emile, her children, and in heaven, the souls of all the people hurt at Ruby Pier. Born years before Eddie, Ruby was the prettiest daughter in a working-class family. She was a young waitress at a diner by the ocean, where she became engaged to the rich Emile. Emile gave Ruby an extravagant life, and built Ruby Pier in dedication to her. After a fire destroyed the park and their wealth, they led a difficult life. Ruby's husband was later hospitalized in the same room as Eddie's dying father, allowing Ruby to witness Eddie's father's dying words of regret. In heaven, Ruby tells Eddie the true story of how his father died saving Mickey, and teaches him the lesson of forgiveness.

Emile – Ruby's husband, a young, handsome, risk-taking entrepreneur whose endeavors bring him great wealth. He is enthralled with glamour, money, the ocean, and Ruby herself. He pours his energy and money into building and maintaining Ruby Pier in dedication to his love for his young wife. When the first Ruby Pier burns to the ground, he is left crippled, financially ruined, and depressed. For the rest of his life, he is in and out of the hospital, and Ruby spends her life caring for him.

Noel – Eddie's friend during his thirties, Noel runs a laundry business. Noel is obsessed with the racetrack, and frequently influences Eddie to indulge with him in their shared gambling habit. Noel is with Eddie at the racetrack on the birthday when Marguerite gets into a car accident. From then on, Eddie gradually stops seeing Noel, as Noel becomes a reminder of Eddie's fault in causing Marguerite's accident.

Tala – Eddie's fifth person in heaven, a little Filipino girl who Eddie unknowingly kills while he and his unit are escaping captivity during the war. Tala is affectionate, trusting, and wise. Following her mother's instructions, Tala hides from Eddie and his men in one of the abandoned village huts. Thinking the huts are empty, Eddie and his unit set the village on fire to send for a rescue signal. Standing before one of the flaming huts, Eddie thinks he sees a small shadow move, but his unit forces him out before he can be sure. All his life, Eddie feels consumed by a darkness, and tries to convince himself nobody was in the hut. In heaven, Eddie is overcome with guilt to realize that the shadow he saw was Tala. Tala then teaches Eddie that he was supposed to be at Ruby Pier all along, keeping children safe to redeem himself for killing Tala.

God – God is only mentioned in four instances in the book. The first is when the Blue Man tells Eddie that the Five People in heaven are a gift from God to understand one's life on earth. The second is in reference to Eddie praying during the war, and ceasing to pray after Rabozzo is killed. The third when Eddie asks Marguerite if God knows he is in heaven, and Marguerite tells him, "of course." Finally, at the end of the novel, when Eddie travels peacefully through the sky to a Ferris wheel where Marguerite awaits him, he hears God saying, "Home." Though not directly mentioned through most of the novel, God's existence is implied in the design of heaven's colors and various rules. Tala's lesson that Eddie was "supposed to be there" at Ruby Pier also implies that God takes an active role in giving people opportunities for redemption.

Narrator – The novel is written from the point of view of an omniscient narrator. Though the narrator is not a character in any of the stories, and never speaks in the first person, his

(presumably the narrator is male because the author is, but this is never stated) frequent commentary about human nature and frequent interpretations of the actions of the characters give the narrator a strong, reflective voice.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Willie – Another young man who works in Maintenance at Ruby Pier, Willie is there with Dominguez when Eddie dies. He joins Dominguez in missing Eddie.

Smitty – One of the men in Eddie's unit, Smitty is usually quiet. He is held captive along with the rest of the unit, and helps Eddie lead their escape.

Morton – Another of the men in Eddie's unit, Morton has a nervous tick of chatting constantly. He is held captive along with the rest of the unit, and also helps Eddie lead their escape.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

REDEMPTION AND FORGIVENESS

Throughout the novel, Eddie's encounters with the five people he meets in heaven teach him about the surprising ways in which life and death offer opportunities for redemption. He learns about the full extent of his own and others' transgressions, and consequently moves through anger, regret and forgiveness on his way to finding peace.

The harm Eddie causes others is often unintentional, as his actions are full of unintended consequences. As a child, he unknowingly causes the Blue Man's death by carelessly running into the street to catch a lost ball. While escaping captivity as a soldier in the Philippines during World War II, Eddie unknowingly kills Tala, a little girl hiding in one of the huts that he and his men have set on fire. Later, Eddie spends his birthday gambling—against his wife's wishes—and on her way to stop him, Marguerite gets into a severe car accident, which drains their finances and her health. Consequently, Eddie and Marguerite are forced to cancel their plans to adopt a child—destroying Marguerite's chances of being a mother. In heaven, however, Eddie finds the opportunity to redeem himself for all of his transgressions against others, including those he didn't know he committed.

Yet the novel also shows that many of Eddie's "sins" are just a part of being human, as everyone will hurt someone at some point. There aren't any real "good guys" and "bad guys"—Eddie has caused a lot of pain, yet he was also a hero. He took care of his sick mother and all the children at Ruby Pier, and his dying act was to save a little girl. Other characters, primarily male, also show this capability for both good and bad. Mickey O'Shea, the friend of Eddie's parents, was a loving and helpful part of Eddie's life in all of Eddie's memories. In heaven, however, Eddie learns that Mickey drunkenly tried to rape Eddie's mother, an act that led Eddie's father and Mickey into the fight that caused Eddie's father's death—while he was saving Mickey from an ocean storm. In heaven, Eddie meets Ruby, who explains the story of Eddie's father and Mickey. She urges Eddie to forgive Mickey, as well as to see his father's dying act of saving Mickey as evidence that he was capable of good. This is difficult, as Eddie's memory of his father is of the callous and violent man who abused him as a child and neglected him during his adulthood.

Redemption can often come indirectly as well, the novel concludes. When Eddie meets Tala in heaven, she explains to him that by spending his life protecting the children on the rides at Ruby Pier, Eddie earned Tala's forgiveness. Tala shows her forgiveness by choosing to be the person who brings Eddie to heaven. Eddie's father, on the other hand, never apologizes to Eddie for his abusive, neglectful behavior—yet from Ruby's perspective, Eddie's father sought redemption in the end by saving Mickey, as well as calling out for Eddie on his deathbed. Ultimately Albom seems to conclude that sin and suffering are an inevitable part of life and human nature, and therefore the ability to redeem oneself and forgive others is both necessary and vital.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ALL HUMANS

All the characters within the novel are connected in unexpected ways, even when their lives are separate and they don't ever meet on earth. Eddie barely remembers the Blue Man, and yet he caused his death and became a memorable part of the Blue Man's understanding of his own life on Earth. Eddie's time in the war was marked forever by his haunting memory of a shadow in the village fire he started, which he hoped wasn't a human. Yet in death, when he learns that the shadow was a little girl named Tala, and that he did kill her, he also learns that she was the one who saved him and brought him to heaven. Eddie never met Ruby during his life, as she was much older and they weren't directly related, but the amusement park where Eddie works all his life, Ruby Pier, was built for Ruby by her husband. Ruby feels connected to Eddie, as she was present in the shared hospital room when Eddie's father died. After Ruby died, she watched Eddie from heaven, and feels connected to the pain Eddie and others experienced at Ruby Pier, as she feels responsible for the park's existence.

Another important thing Eddie learns about human connection

is that connections made in life remain after death, through memory as well as the connection between heaven and earth. Eddie feels alone after the death of his wife, Marguerite, but when he meets her in heaven she compels him to see that their connection wasn't severed after death—only transformed. "Lost love," she tells him, "is still love." While Eddie's memories of his father's abuse haunt him throughout his life, his memories of his mother's love and warmth stay with him as well. Indeed, Eddie's memories of those he loves keep him company even after those loved ones have died. In this context, connections that seem insignificant take on great meaning. Eddie's relationship with his co-worker Dominguez may seem professional, but after Eddie's death, Dominguez is the person who best keeps Eddie's memory alive on Earth.

An important part of the interconnectedness of human life is, Eddie learns, the necessity of sacrifice. If everyone is connected, then almost any action can cause suffering to someone else, but one's own suffering is also often a necessary part of helping someone else. The Blue Man doesn't lament that he died after trying to avoid crashing into Eddie, who ran in front of the Blue Man's car as a child. Rather, the Blue Man sees his death as a sacrifice that allowed Eddie to live. Similarly, the Captain doesn't regret dying while saving his unit from captivity, and he tells Eddie not to feel sorry for himself for losing his leg in the war. He tells him, "Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else." The Captain chooses to make his heaven the peaceful rejuvenation of the jungle battleground—as if heaven means knowing that his earthly sacrifices led to peace and new life for others. Making a sacrifice for someone else thus more deeply entwines the fate of the giver with the receiver, creating a special connection that survives even after death.

THE CYCLE OF LIFE AND DEATH

Life and death are a continuous cycle, making birth and death different ends of the same spectrum of existence. Eddie's life story is told in intertwining vignettes, in which the beginning and end of his life melt together as if they were always happening at the same time. In heaven, the agelessness of characters like Marguerite, the Captain, Ruby, and Tala implies that birth and death are all happening at once from the viewpoint of eternity.

In Albom's novel death isn't the end, but another kind of beginning. As the Captain explains to Eddie, people naively think that death is the end in the same way that the first man, Adam, may have thought that he was dying on the first night he went to sleep. Because existence on earth is all that people know, they fail to realize that death is a kind of sleep that ushers them into a new experience, a "tomorrow." The point of heaven, the Captain explains, is to have a place in which to deeply explore "your yesterday." In heaven, every character who has died experiences a new kind of existence.

Highlighting that death is a mirror of life, Eddie goes through the same physical and emotional changes he experienced throughout his life on earth. When Eddie first arrives in heaven, he feels nimble like a child. Yet as he moves through the stages and meets the five people, he physically feels his body changing, as if it were aging again. He sees the skies changing color as he falls through each part of heaven, and he feels a whirl of emotions—sadness, love, peace, fear, joy—as he sees the colors change. At the end of the novel, he realizes these colors are all the emotions of his life.'

Loss, represented by death, is an essential part of life that is pervasive throughout the novel. The pain of loss gives meaning to the things and people lost, highlighting how without death there is no shape to life. Eddie deeply mourns the loss of his leg, of his joy, and later of Marguerite. Yet his losses also give meaning to the things he has felt and had. By losing Marguerite, Eddie feels fully the weight of the love he had for her. And just as death is not really the end, neither is loss permanent—in heaven, Eddie regains his mobility, his joy, and Marguerite.

THE VALUE IN ORDINARY LIFE

Throughout the novel, Eddie struggles to see value in his life, which he sees as ordinary and filled with unmet dreams and plans. Having never left Ruby Pier to study engineering or make a life for himself elsewhere, he believes his life was devoid of accomplishment and therefore meaningless. But the novel, by describing the nuance and detail of every period of Eddie's life, shows the beauty inherent in all of the moments and relationships that make up that life, even those that appear mundane. The characters Eddie meets in heaven then teach him that his life had meaning and value from the moment he was born.

Throughout the novel, human connection is the primary source of life's meaning. Eddie's love for his mother, his brother, and especially Marguerite animate him and give him a sense of connection. Every moment he shares with these characters stays with him as a treasured memory, creating beauty in his life. Even difficult memories and pain connect Eddie to others, as well as to his own sense of humanity.

Routines, though they may seem boring or ordinary, can also give life shape and allow relationships to grow. Eddie's routine with Marguerite gives meaning to their life, and allows their love to heal back together after Marguerite's accident. Eddie's routine life working at Ruby Pier may bore him, but there is meaning in his routines. He becomes known as someone others can trust—both among children who visit the park and the men he works with, who miss him terribly when he dies.

The novel also conveys the idea that all lives have value, even those that are unrecognized by others. Society often cruelly dehumanizes some of its members, and the existence of "circus

freaks," like the Blue Man, highlights this tendency. Yet it is the Blue Man who teaches Eddie that "No life is a waste." From the outside, it might appear that the Blue Man's life was of little value, but on Ruby Pier the Blue Man found a sense of home and belonging, as he formed a community with other members of the circus and the recurring visitors.

Sacrifice, Eddie learns from the Captain, is another element that gives life meaning. The Blue Man unintentionally sacrifices his life for Eddie when he swerves his car to avoid hitting Eddie. He tells Eddie that dying by sparing another's life is a worthy way to die. The Captain tells Eddie that Eddie's lost leg was a necessary sacrifice for saving his country. Rather than feeling embittered by the loss, he should be glad because sacrifice is worthy and important. Overall, Albom emphasizes the fact that even those parts of life that seem the most mundane or unpleasant do, in fact, have great value in the overarching scheme of things.

TIME

Time is used to mark significant moments and periods in Eddie's life, as well as to show the fluidity between life and death. Time is always moving forward, and yet by telling the story in out-of-order episodes, Albom creates the sense that time is not necessarily linear—particularly from the point of view of eternity and heaven.

In between stories of Eddie's encounters with the five people in heaven, there are short snapshots from Eddie's life. Beginning with his birth, each of these sections is titled: "Today is Eddie's Birthday." By marking Eddie's birthdays in this way, the novel more clearly defines the changes in Eddie's life as he moves through time. The final chapter then strings together all of Eddie's birthdays after Marguerite's death to show how after losing his wife, Eddie's birthdays become increasingly lonely, and eventually he stops marking them at all. With all his loved ones gone, his life no longer feels differentiated, or worth taking note of as it progresses. Thus relationships appear to define time in some sense—without human connection, time becomes a more amorphous and incomprehensible.

On earth (in the novel), there is the sense that time is always running out. The book begins by describing the hours before Eddie's death at the amusement park. Each new section of the first chapter begins by stating how many more minutes Eddie has to live: "Sixteen minutes left to live, Eddie…." or "Fourteen minutes before his death." When Eddie tries to save the little girl from the falling ride, he feels he is fighting against time, calculating minutes and seconds in his mind to see if he can make it. Yet in heaven, characters do not experience time. They wait for each other to join them in different parts of heaven without counting the time, and experiencing a kind of eternity—in which time is not linear, but exists all at once, similar to how Eddie is detached from time after death and can perceive the arc of his life as a whole. Without aging, night, day, or an external rhythm (no place to "be"), the characters experience their existence through memories and emotions in a dreamlike state. At the end of his journey through heaven, Eddie himself enters into this state, and eventually gets the endless time with Marguerite that he has always wanted.

GENDER ROLES

While gender roles are not directly discussed in the novel, strong differences exist between Albom's depictions of female and male characters, to the point that gender roles become an important theme. The primary difference in the portrayal of men and women is that the novel's female characters are nearly all defined by their relationships to male characters, while male characters are defined by their goals, occupations, and actions. Several male characters are mentioned as not having wives (like the Blue Man and Mickey Shea) or their potential wives or children are hardly mentioned (like with the Captain and Dominguez), whereas every adult female in the novel is described as some man's wife or mother (Marguerite, Eddie's mother, Ruby). To Marguerite, happiness is defined by her role as wife and bride, so much so that she chooses a heaven full of endless weddings around the world. Every depicted memory of Marguerite's life is in relation to her hopes and disappointments with Eddie, her husband. While Eddie's life contains many relationships and internal struggles that aren't associated with Marguerite, it appears that Marguerite's central defining relationship is with Eddie, and both her joys and struggles center around him.

Female characters in the novel also exhibit similar traits—they tend to be nurturing, caring towards others, and preoccupied with children and husbands. Male characters, meanwhile, are more often preoccupied with achievements and actions. Eddie spends his life trying to leave Ruby Pier to make more of himself as an engineer, while his wife spends her life focusing on taking care of Eddie and trying, in vain, to bear children. In heaven, the Captain remembers battle and dedicating his life in service to his country, while the Blue Man remembers his struggle to escape poverty and find his place in society. Both Ruby and Marguerite, however, remember their struggles to find peace with their husbands.

Another part of this gendered dichotomy is that females in the novel tend to be the victims of danger or violence, while males are the source of danger and violence. Eddie's mother comforted and loved him, whereas his father beat him and withheld affection. There are no instances of female characters causing pain or violence to other characters. Tala is the ultimate bystander of violence, as a female child killed in a war in which all the fighters are male. Marguerite gets into a terrible car accident while driving to save Eddie from his gambling addiction, and this accident is caused directly by teenage boys throwing glass bottles off a bridge, and indirectly by Eddie's

reckless behavior. Mickey O'Shea attempts to rape Eddie's mother, and when Eddie's father walks in, he blames his wife and adds to her experience of violence by jerking her around.

In heaven, Ruby tells Eddie the story of Mickey's attempted rape, but explains that Mickey deserved to be forgiven because he had done many good things to help Eddie's family. Ruby also encourages Eddie to forgive his father for physically and mentally abusing him as a child, as she shows Eddie that his father was capable of kindness. The principal female characters, however—Eddie's mother and Marguerite—don't need to seek redemption, as they never commit seriously hurtful or violent acts. Men are thus the only characters depicted as capable of both good and evil. Because of all this, it could be argued that Albom only truly humanizes his male characters, while his female characters remain flat, idealized, and locked into gender roles.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

RUBY PIER

Ruby Pier is the amusement park on the ocean where Eddie works in maintenance for most of his life. A place of both great celebration and great pain for Eddie and others, the park represents the variety of experience in Eddie's life. Ruby Pier, like Eddie's life, is full of rides that bring joy and excitement, as well as dangerous risks and losses. At first the park stands only as a symbol of Eddie's sense of failure, as throughout his life, Eddie has failed to achieve his goal of leaving Ruby Pier to create a better life for himself elsewhere. In heaven, however, Eddie learns from the little girl Tala that he was *meant* to be at Ruby Pier. His work at the park allowed him to save countless children from danger, thus giving him a chance to redeem himself for unknowingly killing Tala during the war.

THE OCEAN

Throughout the novel, the ocean represents both destruction and new beginnings. Powerfully beautiful and yet dangerous, it is a constant at Ruby Pier. To Ruby, the ocean represents how ambition can turn into destruction: her husband, Emile, was captivated by the romance and opportunity of sea resorts, and became consumed with the effort of building Ruby Pier. When the park burned down, all of his dreams burned with it. The ocean is also where Eddie and Marguerite first fall in love, and years later it is there where they renew their love after it has faded. The ocean is also a constant reminder to Eddie of the world beyond, and his failure to leave Ruby Pier. While Eddie's father dies from the pneumonia he catches during storm on the ocean, it is that same ocean storm which also gives him the chance to redeem himself by saving his friend, Mickey Shea, from drowning.

MAINTENANCE

Eddie's job in maintenance represents the ordinary routines, relationships, and efforts to "keep going" that add shape and momentum to everyday life. Eddie's job, like his life, is about maintaining the status quo—he doesn't create, build, or change anything, but just keeps the rides going safely. For most of his life, Eddie feels like he is invisible or doesn't matter, because he hasn't accomplished anything great. But maintenance work, like the most ordinary aspects of life, is deeply important even when its importance isn't visible to others. Tala flips Eddie's perspective by showing him that his job was actually heroic, affording him the chance to save people's lives.

COLOR AND DARKNESS

After his death, Eddie travels through endlessly changing colors in between the phases of heaven. As stated directly during the final pages of the novel, Eddie discovers that these colors represent the ever-changing "emotions of his life." No one color is more prominent than another, and they are all described in beautiful, specific language. Likewise, Eddie's emotions are all equally important and add beauty and detail to his experiences in life. Colors also bring Eddie's memories to life: he remembers the dark brown of Marguerite's hair, the whiteness of the ribbons she wrapped around bags of taffy on his birthdays, and the blackness of the coal mines where he was held captive during the war. Eddie's depression and struggle to feel emotion after the war is described as the "darkness."

BIRTHDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

The novel flashes back and forth between Eddie's passage through heaven and the retelling of his life story, using birthdays to mark each episode of Eddie's life. Birthdays and other celebrations thus represent the passage of time, and they add importance to each milestone in Eddie's life. When Marguerite is alive, Eddie feels enough joy and meaning to celebrate with her—they celebrate their wedding, birthdays, and they hold a farewell party before she dies. Celebrations highlight relationships and connections, and add meaning to the ordinary routine of life. After Marguerite's death, Eddie no longer feels like life is worth celebrating.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Hachette Books edition of *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* published in 2006.

Chapter 1 Quotes

It might seem strange to start a story with an ending. But all endings are also beginnings. We just don't know it at the time.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

We kick off with a discussion of the transient nature of human existence. Life is very short--indeed, the main character of the book, Eddie, will die almost immediately. And yet, the passage seems to suggest, death is never exactly the end. Sure enough, the book will show us that (in the world of Albom's book, at least)death is just a stage in our passage to the afterlife.

More generally, though, the passage suggests that lives are closely connected. On Earth, humans are constantly influencing each other in tiny but important ways, of which they're usually unaware. Thus, the end of one person's story could easily influence the beginning of someone else. We'll see many examples of such a principle in action--just as one phase of Eddie's life is coming to an end, he'll do something that begins a new phase of life for someone else.

His plans never worked out (...) Like his father before him, like the patch on his shirt, Eddie was maintenance – the head of maintenance – or as kids sometimes called him, "the ride man at Ruby Pier."

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we get a better sense for what kind of man Eddie is. Using free indirect discourse, the narrator seems to speak in Eddie's voice: thus, when we're told that Eddie never managed to make the life he wanted for himself, we get the idea that Eddie is talking to himself as he goes through the motions of working at Ruby Pier. Eddie sees his life as a failure: he had some plans, and never quite managed to achieve any of them. Specifically, he tried to save up to become an engineer after coming back from the army, but never found much success. Furthermore, Eddie is intensely lonely--the people with whom he spends the most time, the children at the Pier, don't even know his name. The book will challenge Eddie's pessimism, however--showing that Eddie accomplished a great deal in his life, whether he realized it or not.

For the rest of his life, whenever he thought of Marguerite, Eddie would see that moment, her waving over her shoulder, her dark hair falling over one eye, and he would feel the same arterial burst of love.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, Marguerite

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

With less than twenty minutes left to live (though he doesn't know this), Eddie thinks about the love of his life, and his wife of many years: Marguerite. This passage is interesting because although Eddie's thoughts of Marguerite seem unexpected and unmotivated at this particular point, they make a certain amount of sense from *our* perspective--Eddie is thinking about the love of his life, just a few minutes before his life comes to an end.

The passage also shows us that Eddie, while lonely in the present, wasn't always so isolated. He's clearly capable of love for other people, and has received love in the past, making his current loneliness especially sympathetic. Eddie isn't a bad guy by any means--quite the contrary--but he's allowed himself to get weighed down with cynicism and self-doubt.

Chapter 4 Quotes

Later, she will walk him along the pier, perhaps take him on an elephant ride, or watch the fishermen pull in their evening nets, the fish flipping like shiny, wet coins. She will hold his hand and tell him God is proud of him for being a good boy on his birthday, and that will make the world feel right-side up again.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, Eddie's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24-25

Explanation and Analysis

In this important passage, we meet Eddie when he's only 5 years old. His father (who is generally an antagonistic character) ritually holds him upside down and "shakes him out" every year on his birthday to symbolize his growing maturity. Eddie seems not to like being shaken out; in the passage, for instance, he looks forward to the moment when the ritual is over and his mother will help turn the world "right-side up again." This is just one example of the primary role the female characters take in the book: that of (rather one-dimensional) caregivers and nurturing figures, primarily taking care of men or children.

The passage is also notable in that it brings up God. The novel has been praised for its Christian themes (it's all about Heaven, after all), but it gives few details of doctrine or specific beliefs, and overall, there's meant to be a more general spiritual element to the story. The novel's religion seems to hinge on the belief that our lives are interconnected in complex, challenging ways--thus, the spiritualism of the book is more universal and accessible than the specific teachings of Christianity (or any other organized religion, for that matter).

Chapter 6 Quotes

People think of heaven as a paradise garden, a place where they can float on clouds and laze in rivers and mountains. But scenery without solace is meaningless. This is the greatest gift God can give you: to understand what happened in your life.

Related Characters: The Blue Man (speaker), Eddie, God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Eddie has arrived in Heaven, but he's surprised to find that Heaven looks more or less like Ruby Pier, the place Eddie's just come from. Furthermore, Eddie finds himself talking to a figure he knew well when he (Eddie) was just a kid--the Blue Man, a carnival "freak." The Blue Man is the first person Eddie will meet in Heaven; as such, he gives Eddie some of the most basic lessons about Heaven. Here, he essentially explains what Heaven is "for."

The Blue Man suggests that the purpose of Eddie's time in Heaven is at first to do work, not just savor everlasting pleasure. Eddie must come to terms with his own life, understanding what he's accomplished during his time on the Earth. The notion that people who enter Heaven have to think on their lives--i.e., do some mental and emotional work--is surprising. And yet, the very fact that Eddie is in Heaven as he thinks back on his existence suggests that his contemplation will eventually bring him joy.

Chapter 9 Quotes

Sometimes you have to do things when sad things happen.

Related Characters: Eddie's Mother (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

In this touching passage, Eddie is turning 8 years old, and he's forced to go to a funeral on his birthday. Eddie is too young to really understand what it means to be dead--or why he, someone who doesn't know the deceased, really needs to go to the funeral. (This is ironic, since, we later learn, Eddie is the accidental cause of the man's death.) Eddie, as a child, thinks that he can separate his own pleasure from other people's pain--he can stay home and watch TV while other people cry. His life is his own, nobody else's.

Eddie's logic is crude, and yet it's more or less the same reasoning that most adults use. The passage implies that there's something immature and foolish about the notion that we should only care about our own happiness. True maturity and wisdom, we come to see, stem from the realization that the universe is a complicated place, in which one person's life influences hundreds of other lives.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ You are here so I can teach you something (…) That you can no more separate one life from another than you can separate a breeze from the wind.

Related Characters: The Blue Man (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47-48

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, the Blue Man teaches Eddie one of the most basic lessons of the book--maybe the most basic one of all. All lives are connected, whether we like it or not. Those who try to live their lives separate from other lives are either foolish or in denial; they ignore a basic truth of the universe. As we've already seen, Eddie believed that his life was basically separate from the life of the Blue Man--and yet a little knowledge reveals that their two lives were closely and profoundly connected.

Eddie has learned the Blue Man's lesson; yet he'll struggle to *understand* it for the rest of the book. Eddie will meet other figures whose lives he influenced in major ways, and gradually, he'll begin to realize that his life wasn't lonely at all; it was actually eventful and exciting, albeit in ways Eddie himself never fully appreciated.

❝ It is because the human spirit knows, deep down, that all lives intersect. That death doesn't just take someone, it misses someone else, and in the small distance between being taken and being missed, lives are changed.

Related Characters: The Blue Man (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

The message here, as delivered by the Blue Man, is that human beings naturally understand that all human lives are connected, particularly when it comes to living and dying. For example, the Blue Man lost his life in trying to protect the life of Eddie the 8-year-old child--one man's death allowed for another person's life.

All humans are naturally understand the importance of funerals and births--the Blue Man says this is because humans instinctively know that death and life are connected to each other. The passage is particularly interesting because it argues that we all know what the Blue Man is saying--it's just that during the course of our lives, we allow ourselves to become distracted from truth. The purpose of Eddie's time in Heaven, then, isn't to teach him new, exciting truths, but to *remind* him of what he secretly knew all along.

❝ Strangers (…) are just family you have yet to come to know."

Related Characters: The Blue Man (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

The Blue Man gives Eddie another version of the same lessons he's been teaching: all lives are connected in tiny yet crucial ways. A human being isn't just connected to his friends and family--he's also connected to strangers. The Blue Man's message helps us understand the structure of the novel, as Eddie is going to meet lots of people whom he barely knows, and yet the life of each person Eddie is about to meet has been forever altered by Eddie's own actions, good or bad.

The Blue Man's message is both inspiring (if cliched) and intimidating. We tend to think that being a "good person" means living a good, peaceful life and not causing harm to anybody else. What the Blue Man is effectively saying is that we have no real control over our own lives--we're always on the verge of causing some unseen change in another person's life; we don't even know if the change will be good or bad. Humans like to pretend that they're in control of what they do and say, but the Blue Man (and Albom) is arguing that humans are only dimly aware of what they're really doing to other people.

❝ No life is a waste (…) The only time we waste is the time we spend thinking we are alone.

Related Characters: The Blue Man (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Chapter 3, the Blue Man gives Eddie a final piece of useful advice about the nature of life. The Blue Man has been telling Eddie that our lives are not really our own: everything we do has an effect on the people around us, often in ways that we're only dimly aware of. (For example, an innocent episode from Eddie's childhood caused the death of the Blue Man, unbeknownst to Eddie himself.)

What, then, should be the enlightened person's response to the Blue Man's lessons? How do we live our lives in a way that respects the complexity of the universe? (More pointedly, does it matter whether or not we respect the complexity of the universe? Seems like our lives are unpredictable either way.) The Blue Man suggests that one can attain a kind of "inner peace" by accepting that one's life is "bound up" in millions of other lives. There is, in effect, never a reason to feel lonely: we're always connected to other people.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ Young men go to war. Sometimes because they have to, sometimes because they want to. Always, they feel they are supposed to. This comes from the sad, layered stories of life, which over the centuries have seen courage confused with picking up arms, and cowardice confused with laying them down.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

The book has an interesting attitude toward the idea of war: the narrator claims that war is neither inherently good or bad. The problem, however, is that many soldiers join the army because they want to appear noble and brave, not because they sincerely believe in the virtues of the war itself. Eddie seems to be one of the many soldiers who joins the army to "become a man." In short, Eddie substitutes vague masculine ideals for genuine courage and resolve--he become a soldier because he thinks "it's what men do."

Notice that the book isn't saying that war is either good or bad--war, like life, is whatever you make of it. Albom isn't a pacifist; he wants people to stand up for whatever they believe in, provided that they're sincere in their beliefs.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ As always with Marguerite, Eddie mostly wants to freeze time.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, Marguerite

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Eddie thinks about his beloved girlfriend (and later wife), Marguerite. In the flashback, Eddie kisses Marguerite and tries to tell her to wait for him--amazingly, Marguerite seems to read Eddie's mind, and promises that she'll wait for him to return from the war. Eddie's love for Marguerite is clear: he even wishes that he could freeze time forever and savor his moment with Marguerite, instead of going off to battle.

The passage is especially interesting because the entirety of the novel is devoted to the idea that human beings *can't* freeze time; i.e., time and life happen to all of us, whether we like it or not. Eddie's desire to escape from time is poignant, then, because no human being can do so: we all go through life influencing people in unexpected ways.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ Adam's first night on earth? (...) He doesn't know what sleep is. His eyes are closing and he thinks he's leaving this world, right? Only he isn't. He wakes up the next morning and he has a fresh new world to work with. But he has something else, too. He has his yesterday (...) That's what heaven is. You get to make sense of your yesterdays.

Related Characters: The Captain (speaker), Eddie, God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Eddie continues talking to the Captain, with whom Eddie served in World War II. The Captain gives Eddie an interesting parable to illustrate a point: when Adam (the first human, according to the Bible) went to sleep after the first day of his life, he must have thought the world was ending forever. And yet the world didn't end--he woke up again and got to live longer. By the same token, human beings like to believe that life ends with death; instead, life

continues in a different form. The beauty of Heaven, we've come to see, is that it gives people the benefit of hindsight: it allows people to look back on their lives and learn from their mistakes and experiences.

> Sacrifice is a part of life. It's supposed to be. It's not something to regret. It's something to aspire to.

Related Characters: The Captain (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

The Captain, we know by now, sacrificed his life during war to protect the lives of his fellow soldiers, clearing a path and setting off a land mine in the process. Curiously, the Captain seems not to regret his untimely death at all--rather, he's proud that he was able to save the lives of his troops by sacrificing his own life. Sacrifice, he goes on, is a noble act, maybe the most noble act of all.

We've already encountered sacrifice--voluntary or involuntary--in many forms in the novel. Eddie sacrifices his life for a child at the Pier, the Blue Man sacrifices his life to keep Eddie alive, and the Captain sacrifices his life for his troops. In each case, we should notice that the person who dies doesn't seem angry--sacrifice is an honor, proving the noble truth that humans are connected to other humans in both living and dying.

> Sometimes when you sacrifice something, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else.

Related Characters: The Captain (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the novel is at its most overtly Christian. The Captain, who has sacrificed his life foe the benefit of his troops, claims that sacrifice is the highest good. Sacrifice--a cornerstone of Christianity, considering Christ's sacrifice on the cross--is a noble act because it assumes that one's life isn't truly one's own. As the Captain argues, life is a gift that must be passed on to others--thus, when they sacrifice themselves for the sake of other people, they're just passing on the gift of life to another person.

The passage recalls a key Christian belief, articulated in the Biblical Book of Job: human beings don't "own" their own lives, and should be grateful to God for whatever they're given in life. As the Captain implies, humans are lucky to be alive at all; therefore, they shouldn't be angry when they die while passing on life to someone else.

Chapter 20 Quotes

> All parents damage their children. It cannot be helped. Youth, like pristine glass, absorbs the prints of its handlers. Some parents smudge, others crack, a few shatter childhoods completely into jagged little pieces, beyond repair.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, Eddie's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, the narrator tells us that Eddie grew up with an abusive father--evidence of the narrator's point that all parents damage their children. Eddie's father is a cruel, tough, indifferent man, who struggles to show affection of any kind for other people. The sad truth of Eddie's life is that he's allowed his father's bad habits to shape his own behavior. Eddie isn't a violent man, but in some ways he's just as cold and indifferent as his father was--he struggles to express his affection for other people, even Marguerite, the love of his life. The passage is tragic and yet strangely liberating--by noting that all parents, good or bad, affect their children strongly, the narrator is suggesting that Eddie's tragedy isn't the end of the world, but just one tiny part of the human experience.

> Eddie privately adored his father, because sons will adore their fathers through even the worst behavior. It is how they learn devotion. Before he can devote himself to God, or a woman, a boy will devote himself to his father, even foolishly, even beyond explanation.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, Eddie's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Strangely, Eddie seems not to hate his father for beating him or gambling excessively. Instead, Eddie worships his father. The narrator notes that parents are our first models for God--Eddie, who grew up with a harsh, often cruel father, seems to think of God as a harsh, cruel being who's abandoned and mistreated Eddie for years. (Notice also that narrator rather narrowly assumes boys mostly look up to fathers, while girls presumably look up to mothers.)

While Eddie's adoration for his father is unfortunate in many ways (as a result of his admiration for his father, Eddie becomes a tougher, grimmer person who struggles to express his feelings), there's also a silver lining: paradoxically, the very fact that Eddie seeks to emulate his father's bad habits proves that Eddie *is* a loving son.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ How can he explain such sadness when she is supposed to make him happy? (...) She looks beautiful wearing the print dress Eddie likes, her hair and lips done up. Eddie feels the need to inhale, as if undeserving of such a moment. He fights the darkness within him. “Leave me alone,” he tells it. “Let me feel this way, I should feel it.”

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, Marguerite

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 118-119

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we see the long-term effects of Eddie's tragic inability to express his feelings. Eddie has been trained to believe in backwards masculine ideals--he's told to keep his feelings bottled up, proving his strength and toughness. As a result, Eddie doesn't know how to tell his beloved wife, Marguerite, about his post-traumatic stress, a result of his service in World War II. Eddie even comes to believe that he's supposed to feel dark and depressed as a result of his military service--machismo tells him that depression is somehow a sign of his maturity.

Eddie loves Marguerite deeply, but because of the culture in which he was raised, he's unsure how to communicate with her, and as a result, their marriage deteriorates.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ The old darkness has taken a seat alongside him. He is used to it by now, making room for it the way you make room for a commuter on a crowded bus.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Eddie meets with his friend for his birthday. Together, they discuss the safety risks at Ruby Pier, where Eddie has been working. Eddie takes the safety hazards at the Pier very seriously--he continues to remember his time in the war, and so the threat of danger is never far from his mind.

The passage is important for a couple reasons. First it shows that Eddie continues to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder--a problem that, thanks to his idea of what a "real man" should be like, he's done nothing to fix. But he has at least achieved a measure of acceptance for his "darkness," and is now used to it to the point that it doesn't seem so traumatic anymore. Whether this fact is comforting or depressing is up to us to decide.

Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ Religion? Government? Are we not loyal to such things, sometimes to the death? (...) Better to be loyal to one another.

Related Characters: Ruby (speaker), Eddie, Eddie's Father, Mickey Shea

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage (one of the most controversial in the novel), Ruby--the next person Eddie meets in Heaven--tells Eddie about how Eddie's father died. Eddie's father went out to save his old friend, Mickey Shea, from drowning, and as a result, Eddie's father himself died of pneumonia.

Eddie is astounded that his father would have risked his life for the sake of something as abstract as loyalty to a friend--especially because, as Ruby has told him, Mickey had just

tried to rape Eddie's own mother. And yet Ruby argues that loyalty to one's friends is something well worth dying for--far more valuable than religion or government. The passage supports Albom's notion that the only "true" religion is a religion of humanity, based on the idea that all people are connected. Abstract religious or political principles are never as important as our relationships with living, breathing people. (Of course, this lesson also comes in the context of a very religious, supernatural "Heaven.")

Chapter 28 Quotes

What people find then is a certain love. And Eddie found a certain love with Marguerite, a grateful love, a deep and quiet love, but one that he knew, above all else, was irreplaceable. Once she'd gone (...) he put his heart to sleep.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, Marguerite

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155-156

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Eddie is reunited with Marguerite, the love of his life. Although we've known about Marguerite for some time, it's only now that we truly understand why she was so special to Eddie. Eddie has always had a tough time showing his feelings--therefore, it was hard for him to make friends and meet people. In Marguerite, Eddie found someone who understood him intuitively--who didn't have to ask him lots of questions or pester him for the truth. Marguerite is, perhaps, the closest thing to a saint in the novel--selflessly, she sacrifices her own needs and happiness for the sake of her husband.

The passage is an interesting example of the controversial way Albom portrays women--more often than not, he depicts them as perfect, moral creatures, whose great purpose on the Earth is to care for complex, conflicted men.

That was my choice (...) A world of weddings, behind every door. Oh, Eddie, it never changes, when the groom lifts the veil, when the bride accepts the ring (...) They truly believe their love and their marriage is going to break all the records...

Related Characters: Marguerite (speaker), Eddie

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 156-157

Explanation and Analysis

Albom's depictions of women in the novel are respectful and yet arguably one-dimensional. Here, for instance, Eddie reunites with Marguerite, his wife, in Heaven--and he's surprised to see that Marguerite sees Heaven as "full of weddings." Marguerite explains that she sees Heaven as a place for weddings because weddings are a defining part of the human experience--they're the moment when two people are on their best behavior and show their love for one another, feeling idealistic and hopeful about the power of their love.

The fact that Marguerite should see Heaven as a place for weddings reflects the truth that her role in the novel is defined purely by the fact that she's Eddie's husband. We don't really know much about Marguerite, except that she's the perfect, saintly wife--we don't know her personality or idiosyncrasies, and Albom doesn't give her the kind of complex inner life that he gives Eddie, the Captain, etc. In the novel, more often than not, women exist to steer complex, emotionally damaged men on the path toward Heaven.

...Eddie admitted that some of his life he'd spent hiding from God, and the rest of the time he thought he went unnoticed.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, God

Related Themes:

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the novel becomes overtly religious (God) without ever mentioning a specific religion. Eddie and Marguerite stroll through Heaven, savoring each other's company. Eddie asks Marguerite if God is watching him, and Marguerite says that he is. Eddie comes to realize that he's spent his life denying God or trying to avoid God.

The passage suggests that Eddie is coming around to the religious point of view that the novel puts forth--a point of view that revolves around the connections between all human beings. The fact that Eddie feels comfortable accepting the absence of God during his life on the Earth suggests that he's finally ready to embrace God in his life in Heaven.

Chapter 35 Quotes

He was nothing now, a leaf in the water, and she pulled him gently, through shadow and light, through shades of blue and ivory and lemon and black, and he realized all these colors, all along, were the emotions of his life.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, Tala

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Eddie goes through a rite of purification that symbolizes his struggle to come to terms with his life on the Earth. Tala--the little girl whom Eddie killed years ago during his time in World War II--leads Eddie into a river, where he finds that colors are coming off of his body. Some of the colors are bright, while others are dark, but together, they make a beautiful rainbow.

The symbolism of the colors is clear enough: Eddie's life has been full of joys and sorrows (bright and dark colors)--and yet the combined effects of so many *different* colors is more stunning than any single color could be. Eddie thinks of the pain in his life as a horrible burden, but in fact, his pain and suffering have actually made his life richer and more complex. It's strange to think that pain can be anything other than miserable, but as Albom sees it, one needs both pleasure and pain to get the full measure of mortal life.

Chapter 36 (Epilogue) Quotes

And in that line now was a whiskered old man (...) who waited in a place called the Stardust Band Shell to share his part of the secret of heaven: that each affects the other and the other affects the next, and the world is full of stories, but the stories are all one.

Related Characters: Narrator (speaker), Eddie, "Amy or Annie"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the novel, we've come full-circle. When we met him, Eddie was just arriving in Heaven, having died at Ruby Pier. Now, Eddie is an experienced resident of Heaven, ready to introduce someone else to the wonders of the afterlife. Furthermore, the first person Eddie will introduce is the young girl whose life Eddie saved by sacrificing his own. Thus, Eddie fulfills the same role for "Amy or Annie" that the Blue Man fulfilled for Eddie years before: he sacrificed his life to save a child, and in Heaven, will tell the child about the importance of sacrifice and interconnectedness.

The novel ends with a theme that Albom has been exploring for some time now: all stories are one. In other words, Eddie's life is only one part of someone else's story (for example, "Amy or Annie"). By accepting the truth about life and interconnectedness, Eddie comes to terms with his life on the Earth and embraces his new existence in Heaven.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The novel begins with an unnamed, omniscient narrator counting down the last sixty minutes until the death of the protagonist, Eddie. It is an ordinary day at Ruby Pier, an amusement park on the ocean where the elderly Eddie has worked in maintenance for all of his life. Eddie knows Ruby Pier inside and out, and everyone greets him by name. Making his usual rounds, he takes two eager young boys with him on a ride to check the ride's function. The novel then briefly flashes back to Eddie's childhood, when he brutally fought another young boy in defense of his older brother Joe—a story kids at Ruby Pier still tell one another. Back in the present, Eddie walks and feels the loss of his youthful strength and health.

For its visitors, Ruby Pier is a place to get away from their ordinary lives, but the irony is that for Eddie the amusement park represents nothing but routine—"maintenance." Eddie's job is to know everything about the physical realities behind the magical experiences. By counting down to Eddie's death, Albom draws attention to the inescapable power of time and the importance of every small action as that time runs out.

The narrator continues the countdown of minutes to Eddie's death. With 30 minutes left to live, Eddie encounters Dominguez, a cheerful young man who works with him in maintenance at Ruby Pier. Eddie gives a very appreciative Dominguez 40 dollars as a gift for his upcoming trip to Mexico, and tells him to buy something special for his wife. Dominguez then checks on a small fishing hole the two men keep behind their office. No fish have been hooked, but Dominguez promises Eddie that one day they'll catch something. Eddie thinks to himself that Dominguez is unrealistically optimistic. Eddie reflects privately on his disappointment that after "the war," he failed to follow through with his plans make a life for himself outside of Ruby Pier.

Maintenance work isn't enough to make Eddie feel happy with himself and his life, but Dominguez appears to be content working in the same place, doing the same kind of work. While it may be a matter of age difference, it also appears that for Dominguez, his relationships—his family, his wife, even his work relationships—are what bring him happiness, and are more important than job satisfaction. In contrast, Eddie's ambitions were what gave value to his life, and his failure to achieve them makes him feel like his life was a disappointment.

With 26 minutes left to live, Eddie tiredly pounds his cane to warn a group of balking teenagers to get off the dangerous boardwalk railing. Recounting another rumored story about Eddie's youth, the narrator describes Eddie as a brave soldier who won many medals in war and came home a hero. However, the story also goes that Eddie's bad leg injury was the result of a fight with another soldier, in which the fate of the other soldier is rumored to have been far worse.

To the kids at Ruby Pier, Eddie is apparently legendary, and the stories about his youth all show him to be tough, even brutal. These stories contrast with Eddie's current role of keeping people safe at Ruby Pier. Not only has time taken Eddie's strength, but it has also transformed the energy he once spent on fighting into a protective energy.

With 19 minutes left to live, Eddie sits down in an aluminum beach chair behind the rides, in what is described as his "usual spot." Sitting there, he begins to remember the day he met Marguerite, his "one true-love." This was years before, when they were both teenagers at Ruby Pier. They danced to big band music by the ocean, and Eddie remembers the dark color of Marguerite's hair falling over her shoulder as she waved goodnight. Eddie went home that night and told his brother Joe that he was going to marry Marguerite. In the present, Eddie has a coughing fit, thinks about his recent Shingles diagnosis, and thinks of how painful it is to remember Marguerite.

The memory of Marguerite shows that Eddie hasn't always been alone. Both the vividness of his memory, as well the pain that the memory brings, betrays an intense capacity for love and longing. In examining the rich inner life of someone seemingly unexceptional and "ordinary," Albom aims to emphasize the value of all human life. For Eddie, Ruby Pier provides a place where the past and present collide. He is unable to escape the hold of the past there, and yet these memories are his company.

The story flashes back to a night three months earlier, when a teenager named Nicky lost his car key on one of the rides at Ruby Pier. The narrator comments regarding this incident that, "No story sits by itself."

By stating that "no story sits by itself," the narrator sets up Nicky's lost key to become a crucial detail. This line also connects to the novel's end, and Albom's overall message about the interconnectedness of all humans.

With 14 minutes left to live, the novel returns to Eddie, warmly remembering his first dance with Marguerite at Ruby Pier on the dance floor once called the "Stardust Band Shell." The Judy Garland song, "You Made me Love You" plays in his head against the sounds of Ruby Pier and the ocean waves. A little girl, whom Eddie thinks of as "Amy or Annie," comes up and addresses him by name as "Eddie Maint'nance." She eagerly asks him to make her a pipe cleaner rabbit—a trick Eddie has been doing for years for kids at the park.

As Eddie nears his death, the past and present begin to converge. The music from his first dance with Marguerite sounds as real to him as the ocean waves in the present. While deep in his memories, Eddie still pulls himself back to reality to pay attention to the little girl. Apparently Eddie connects with people at the park through small, kind gestures.

Eddie suddenly hears a woman screaming, and he moves as quickly as he can towards the noise. He sees a cart full of passengers about to tip on one of the rides, which is called "Freddy's Free Fall." Eddie mentally reviews the structure of the ride while a crowd of people gathers. Eddie directs the nerve-wracked Dominguez and Willie to climb a ladder and secure the cart long enough to help the passengers out. They do so, but while the crowd is cheering the rescue, Eddie realizes that the cart itself is going to fall. He tries to alert the crowd to get back, but amidst the cheering nobody hears him. Suddenly, he sees the little girl "Amy or Annie" standing directly beneath the hazardous cart. Hoping he can make it in time, Eddie runs to save her. Just as he dies from the falling cart, he feels two small hands taking his own.

Though Eddie's job in maintenance seems ordinary and mundane, his knowledge of the rides allows him to act heroically to save the riders. While the crowd and the other workers are panicked, Eddie is able to think and give orders clearly and quickly. Old age and injury have taken much away from Eddie, but he is still able to act like a soldier in a crisis. Eddie doesn't know the little girl well, but his act of sacrifice connects them intimately. It seems that it is the little girl's hands that Eddie holds as he dies, but we will later learn that this isn't the case.

CHAPTER 2

The novel flashes back to Eddie's birth in a poor hospital in the 1920s. Eddie's father is smoking cigarettes in a waiting room when a nurse comes out and calls his name. Eddie's father shows little emption, until the nurse points to baby Eddie through a glass window—and then his father smiles, because the baby is "his."

Though Eddie has died, the novel's narrative of his life has just begin—a metaphor for the idea that heaven is another beginning. By placing the story of Eddie's birth right after his death, Albom again highlights the close relationship between birth and death.

CHAPTER 3

Eddie has just died, and he is now floating through a series of vibrant changing colors and peaceful oceanic scenery, remembering his last moments. He wonders if he saved "Amy or Annie," but suddenly he feels as if everything at Freddy's Free Fall happened years ago. He is surprised to realize that he feels no suffering or sadness—only calm.

The colors bring a sense of vibrancy back to Eddie, whose life on earth had become dull. Albom doesn't make any specific religious claims about heaven, and rarely even mentions God, but the novel depends on the premise of an afterlife and a benevolent force with plans for every person.

CHAPTER 4

The narrative flashes back again. It is Eddie's fifth birthday, and he is playing at his father's feet while his father plays a game of cards. In what he describes as an Irish tradition, Mickey Shea joyfully picks Eddie up by his feet and shakes him out once for each year he has completed, while the other adult men laugh and cheer. Eddie doesn't like being upside down, and afterward he clings to his mother as she takes him out for a walk along the pier until the "world feels right-side up again."

This scene portends that even from the time Eddie is young, there are things in his world that are not right. Adult men form a threatening presence, and the social norm of teasing children allows the men to ignore Eddie's feelings. Eddie's mother takes the female role of comforter.

CHAPTER 5

In the mysterious afterlife, Eddie wakes up alone in the Ruby Pier of his childhood. Surprised at how young and spry he feels, Eddie decides to run around the entire park, enjoying all the familiar old sites. Eddie realizes he has lost his voice. He comes across the "circus freak" show of his childhood, and decides to enter the tent. He hears the announcer describing a pitifully ugly man, and Eddie walks through a dark hall until he encounters the Blue Man—the first person Eddie will meet in heaven. Eddie recognizes the sad, calm expression of this "circus freak" from his childhood.

In heaven, the passage of time is simulated for Eddie as he relives his memories, especially through the landmark of birthdays. The first person Eddie meets is a human part of a dehumanizing exhibit, creating the sense that the curator of Eddie's experience in heaven (God, presumably) is critical of how humans devalue each other. Rather than being an innocent place, the Ruby Pier of Eddie's childhood is already a place of suffering.

CHAPTER 6

Eddie feels like he is dreaming. The Blue Man explains that he is dead and in heaven, and that he feels like a child because he was a child when the Blue Man knew him. Eddie is disappointed that heaven looks like Ruby Pier, but the Blue Man explains that there are many steps to Heaven. He says that Eddie has no voice so that he can listen better. The Blue Man explains that in heaven, everyone first meets five people who help them to understand their experiences on earth. These will always be people who altered one's life in some way, and who have some important connection to them, whether obvious or not. Eventually, everyone will wait for someone else's arrival, and the cycle goes on. Eddie's voice returns. He asks the Blue Man what killed him, and the Blue Man says, "You did."

In the novel's world, heaven isn't just about peace—there is work to be done there too. Eddie doesn't know that he was the one who killed the Blue Man, illustrating that one task in heaven is to learn about the harm done during one's life, as well as to understand how one's actions affected others. Eddie learns from the beginning that connections made on earth carry on into heaven, and in heaven there is greater perspective, so people can see connections that wouldn't have been obvious on earth. There is no hierarchy after death — in heaven, everyone is first the student, and later the teacher.

CHAPTER 7

Eddie is seven years old, playing ball with his older brother, Joe. The ball rolls into the road, and Eddie runs after it. The ball rolls down the road and the boardwalk, and Eddie and Joe run after it all the way to the ground behind the tent of the "circus freaks." A very hairy man scares Joe by asking him what he is doing there, but Eddie retrieves the ball.

The Blue Man was one of many "circus freaks" whom Eddie only thought of as scary. Eddie didn't get to know these workers as people during his life. Still, he is connected to them both because they were a part of his reality, and through whatever happened between him and the Blue Man.

CHAPTER 8

In heaven, Eddie denies killing the Blue Man. Calmly, the Blue Man tells his story. Born Joseph Corvelzchik, his first memory was his mother lifting him over the ocean as they emigrated from Poland. He was then forced to work with his father in a sweatshop as a small child, and he became very anxious, which made his father ashamed. To calm him, a doctor prescribed him silver nitrate. As he grew up, the Blue Man's use of the poisonous remedy turned his skin the color blue. He was then considered a freak, and he found himself alone and jobless until a traveling circus invited him to join them. The Blue Man eventually took pride in being a prized member of the circus. His show came to Ruby Pier, where he was invited to stay on. The park then became his home, and he had a community there and the freedom to live unbothered. Ruby Pier, he explains, is *his* heaven—not Eddie's.

There is a stark inequality between Eddie's and the Blue Man's childhoods. At an age when Eddie was playing with balls, the Blue Man's family was forcing him to work. Adult men—particularly fathers—are again portrayed as the catalysts for suffering. The Blue Man's father expected him to behave like an adult in the sweatshop, but as a child he couldn't meet those expectations. His father then did great damage, causing his son to disfigure himself and endure years of loneliness. Eddie and the Blue Man are connected through Ruby Pier, yet, their different associations with the place highlight the subjectivity of experience.

The novel returns to Eddie's childhood. Eddie has again lost the ball he received for his birthday the year before (which rolled away in the previous flashback). He runs after it, darts across a road, retrieves it, and then returns to play arcade games with his friends. The narrator now recounts the same story, only from the perspective of the Blue Man. The Blue Man is driving when suddenly he sees a boy run into the road. He slams on his breaks to avoid hitting the boy, but his heart is racing, and he begins to lose consciousness. He turns into an ally and hits the back of a parked car. The Blue Man gets out, has a heart attack, and dies. The narrative now returns to heaven. The Blue Man has just retold the story to Eddie from his perspective, and Eddie is shocked to realize that he was the young boy who killed the Blue Man.

Everything in Eddie's world is connected—the same ball that had rolled into the backyard of other "circus freaks" the year before, creating an interaction in which Eddie felt afraid of them, has now led Eddie to cause the death of one of those same "freaks." In heaven, it becomes clear that the monsters of childhood aren't the real villains. People who seem powerful are often victims themselves, and roles of victim-perpetrator can be reversed, even without malice. Even the innocent actions of children can have unintended consequences.

CHAPTER 9

It is Eddie's eighth birthday, and he is complaining that he doesn't want to attend the funeral that his mother is dressing him for. His mother explains that, "Sometimes you have to do things when sad things happen." At the funeral for the unnamed departed at Ruby Pier, Eddie knows he should be expressing sadness along with the adults. Still, he cannot stop thinking about how it's unfair to have to go to a funeral on his birthday. He waits for the funeral to be over so he can return to celebrating.

As a child, Eddie feels so far removed from death that even in its presence, he doesn't feel the reality of it. To children, death isn't something that will ever happen to them—time, to them, seems endless. Though more understandable because he is a child, Eddie's focus on the "unfairness" of the Blue Man's funeral highlights how self-absorbed humans are even in the presence of the loss or suffering of others.

CHAPTER 10

Eddie feels remorseful that the Blue Man died from his own foolish childhood mistake, and pleads with the Blue Man not to punish him. The Blue Man explains to Eddie that the purpose of meeting him in Heaven is not to punish him, but to teach him something.

Eddie's idea of the afterlife is drawn from his human experiences, showing the focus humans have on vengeance rather than redemption and forgiveness. Eddie's childlike fear of punishment also shows that he is reliving the phases of his life.

The Blue Man transports Eddie to the memory of his funeral. Eddie realizes he was there as a child—and it becomes clear that this was Eddie's eighth birthday (as mentioned in the previous chapter). Eddie marvels that back then, he couldn't have known he had caused the Blue Man's death. Eddie tells the Blue Man he shouldn't have had to die because of Eddie's recklessness. The Blue Man disagrees, however, saying that "all lives intersect," and that death takes one person instead of another all the time. He explains that people are "drawn to funerals and babies" because humans intuitively understand that birth and death are integrally related. This cycle of life connects everyone, the Blue Man says, such that "strangers are just family you have yet to come to know."

Though he died alone in an alley, the Blue Man sees his death as an event that connected him to other human lives, including Eddie's. The Blue Man's explanation of the pull humans feel to "babies and funerals" connects back to what Eddie's mother said at the Blue Man's funeral—"sometimes you have to do things when sad things happen." Cosmically, there is a connection between the births and deaths of all humans, and sometimes that invisible connection may be literal, as in the case of the Blue Man sacrificing his life so Eddie could live.

The Blue Man embraces Eddie, and Eddie suddenly feels all of the emotions the Blue Man felt during his time on earth, the "loneliness, the shame, the nervousness, the heart attack." As the Blue Man prepares to leave Eddie, Eddie asks him if he was successful in saving "Amy or Annie" from the cart before he died. When the Blue Man doesn't answer, Eddie feels great despair, assuming that means he didn't save her. He laments that both his death and life were therefore wasted. The Blue Man responds that, "The only time we waste is the time we spend thinking we are alone." Then the Blue Man's skin changes back to normal color, and Eddie is pulled into the sky.

It is significant that it is the Blue Man who teaches Eddie that nobody is alone, as he himself spent most of his life isolated from society. Eddie thinks his life and death were wasted because they were ordinary, but the Blue Man's life shows that the unexpected connections between humans, as well as the shared experiences of emotion, are what give life meaning. Those same connections and experiences allow the Blue Man to treat Eddie like family, and to forgive him.

CHAPTER 11

Back on Earth in the present day, a crowd gathers, gaping, around the scene at Ruby Pier just moments after Eddie's death by the falling cart. Nobody wants to get close to the scene, but nobody can look away. The "carnival tunes" play on in the background. Dominguez rushes out from the crowd, sees the fallen cart and Eddie beneath it, and he cannot believe what has happened. Soon police and emergency workers come, the crowd disappears, the rides are closed down, and Ruby Pier is empty.

Eddie's gruesome death creates a jarring atmosphere at Ruby Pier: the amusement park music seems eerie and inappropriate as a backdrop to tragedy. Crowds of strangers are momentarily connected by the undeniable presence of death. This exemplifies the Blue Man's regarding the attraction people have to funerals, because death is certain for everyone.

CHAPTER 12

It is Eddie's seventeenth birthday, and he is sitting on his bed reading comic books when his mother calls him out to celebrate. In front of all their family and friends, including their visiting cousins from Romania, Eddie's brother Joe announces that Eddie met a girl the night before whom he plans to marry. Eddie tells Joe to shut up, and the two fight until their father breaks them up. Later on during the party, Eddie's mother asks him to dance with her while a record plays. While they dance, she asks Eddie about the girl he met the night before, and whispers that she is happy for him. Then she reaches out to Joe, and makes him and Eddie dance together. Eventually they begin to have fun, and turn their dance into a performance for all their family.

Eddie and his brother both show discomfort with emotion, while their father ignores the news of Eddie's romance. Eddie's mother is the only character comfortable with handling feelings. This scene shows romance and emotion to be in the realm of women (for Albom, apparently), whereas men without women would rather react violently than be vulnerable. Eddie's mother uses her comfort with intimacy to forge a stronger connection between her sons. They only accept this connection when it seems sarcastic or humorous, however, thus hiding their vulnerability.

CHAPTER 13

In heaven, Eddie wakes up on a familiar battleground in a decimated jungle during a storm. He hears explosions and thunder, and starts to run. He realizes he feels strong like a soldier, and no longer limber like a child. He is also surprised to realize he can feel fear in heaven.

Eddie experiences the physical changes of time as he moves into his memories of young adulthood. In the world of the novel, heaven is touched by all aspects of life, not just the beautiful, as memories of violence and destruction must also be explored in making sense of one's life.

The narrator comments that young men sometimes go to war because they confuse battle with bravery. The story now flashes back to Eddie's youth, when World War II was taking place. For Eddie, working at Ruby Pier and trying to save money to study engineering seem irrelevant when other men are shipping out, so Eddie enlists in the army. On one night, not long before shipping out, Eddie is at the arcade range practicing shooting. Mickey Shea appears, and drunkenly warns Eddie that if he needs to shoot, "You fire and you fire and you don't think about who you're shootin or killin or why."

War gives young men like Eddie the chance to prove their character, proving to themselves and others that they are important—thus feeding on their insecurities and their desire to assume the male ideal of bravery. It also connects everyone in a society through a collective effort, which is why Eddie's own goals start to feel "irrelevant." Mickey, however, reminds Eddie that war is about death, and is nothing glorious or romantic.

In heaven, Eddie surveys the ruined jungle and realizes this is the place that has long haunted his nightmares. Eddie hears a voice call to him from the trees. Suddenly finds himself in the trees with the Captain, whom he served under in the Philippines. The Captain confirms that he is Eddie's second person in heaven. The novel then flashes back to all of the lessons Eddie learned in war—such as how to appear unbothered when witnessing the desperation of others, how to pray silently, and how to live efficiently with hunger, cold, lack of shelter, and illness. In heaven, the Captain asks Eddie what he did after the war. Eddie remarks that he went back to his uneventful life, and lost touch with the other men from their unit—preferring not to be reminded of their shared wartime memories.

Battle teaches Eddie another male social ideal—that of emotional toughness, which he has already learned from his father's example. Eddie also experiences the fact that battle forces people to be intimately aware of their own and others' physical and emotional vulnerabilities. Eddie and his men are connected, even silently, through their shared violent deeds, suffering, and closeness to death. After the war, Eddie cuts those connections, demonstrating that war brings death and darkness so close that it affects one for a lifetime, and colors all other human relationships.

The novel flashes back in time. Eddie and his unit—Rabozzo, Morton, Smitty, and the Captain—are in the Philippines and are being held captive by enemy soldiers. While Rabozzo screams in the night, Morton chatters constantly, and Smitty stays quiet, Eddie focuses on his anger. They soon stop eating the salty, bug-ridden rice balls they are fed, and Eddie notices that the enemies themselves—whom the unit calls Crazy One, Two, Three and Four—also seem desperate and malnourished. One day, the "Crazies" force the unit into a dark coalmine. At night, Eddie holds a photo of Marguerite that he keeps crumpled up in his helmet, and bargains with God to return him to her.

By noticing the desperation of his captors, Eddie sees some of their humanity—despite calling them "Crazies." Though they are enemies, they are connected through their shared experiences of hunger and suffering. Eddie focuses on his anger as a defense mechanism to avoid feeling helpless. His photo of Marguerite keeps him anchored to life in the face of death. Eddie fights, not for his ideals or his desire for greatness, but rather for the ordinary relationships that give meaning to his life.

After a few more months, Rabozzo developers a fever and falls down while working in the coalmine. Crazy Two forces him to keep working, and Eddie tries to defend him. In response, Crazy Two leans down and shoots Rabozzo in the head. After Rabozzo is killed, Eddie stops praying. The unit realizes that the "Crazies" are planning to work them to death.

Eddie's self-sacrificing character is evident when he puts himself in danger to defend Rabozzo. Rabozzo's death makes the fragility and helplessness of their situation real. Eddie stops praying because Rabozzo's death symbolizes the men's sense of abandonment by God.

One day, Eddie sees Crazy Three juggling coal, and he decides to show him the correct way to juggle. Eddie begins to entertain the "Crazies" with the carnival skills he learned at Ruby Pier as a child. While they are distracted, Eddie signals his men to help him attack the Crazies by pretending his instructions are part of the carnival tune. On his signal, Eddie stops juggling, pitches the coal to two of the Crazies, and his men seize the other two. By taking their guns while they are down, the unit manages to kill all of their captors. As Smitty kills the last of the Crazies, he says, "For Rabozzo." The unit then decides to burn the place down.

Both in death and life, Eddie often feels that his life at Ruby Pier has lacked meaning or purpose. Yet, it turns out that he and his men are able to make a nearly impossible escape all because of the trivial-seeming juggling skill Eddie learned at Ruby Pier. Though Eddie feels his life is arbitrary and meaningless, this unlikely turn of events and its connection to Eddie's past show how ordinary life is full of purposes which are unknowable—of significance that has yet to unfold.

CHAPTER 14

Further back in time, Eddie is a young man about to ship off to war, and his family and friends are sending him off with an emotional birthday celebration. Throughout the night Eddie thinks of asking Marguerite to wait for him, but he can't bring himself to ask her, even as they spend a romantic evening after the party, walking by the ocean at Ruby Pier. As if reading his mind, Marguerite announces that she will wait for him, and asks only that he come back alive. Eddie wishes that he could "freeze time" with Marguerite.

Again, female characters are shown to have more emotional fluency than their male counterparts, as Marguerite assumes the role of emotional interpreter. The impossible act of "freezing time" would be the only way Eddie could prevent his possible death and permanent separation from Marguerite, and this image creates an early link between time and the cycle of life that results in death.

CHAPTER 15

Back in the Philippines, Eddie and his unit burn down the village of their now-dead captors. Fueled by their suffering and anger, they decide to do this to destroy enemy resources and to send a rescue signal. Eddie is about to destroy one of the last huts, when he sees a small, child-sized shadow moving inside. He thinks of Rabozzo, and of how tired he is of violence and loss. Determined to spare the life of whoever might be in there, Eddie calls kindly for the person to come out, saying he won't shoot. Morton yells to Eddie to hurry, saying nobody is in there. Eddie keeps calling out to the shadow, when suddenly he steps in a flame and his leg catches fire. He feels something shoot through his leg, and he falls. Someone jerks him back, and the next thing he knows, he is in a transport vehicle, barely conscious.

While it's also a practical choice, vengeance is mostly what fuels the men's decision to set the village on fire. Yet as he stands before the flaming hut, the division between Eddie's side and the other side melts—he doesn't think about whether the person in the hut may be an enemy, but rather focuses on loss and death as separate forces, harming all humans involved. Having watched Rabozzo die when he was helpless and weak, Eddie can't imagine taking a life, especially when that life may be small and vulnerable. His sense of mercy has a cleansing quality: engulfed by violence, Eddie wishes to be free of it.

In heaven, the Captain asks Eddie if he remembers how he got out of the village fire, and Eddie can't recall. They talk about the bullet that caught Eddie's leg and caused his fall. Eddie thinks of how much that bullet disabled him, despite the many failed surgeries he underwent after he came home. Left with a limp that would worsen over the course of his life, Eddie thinks of how the bullet took away running, dancing, and feeling like himself. The narrator states that "war had crawled inside of Eddie, in his leg and his soul," and the world thereafter seemed purposeless.

Eddie's sense of purpose is tied to his sense of mobility, because he has always wanted to leave Ruby Pier to make a life elsewhere. Even though it is the darkness of the war that robs Eddie of his momentum, his leg becomes the symbol of his inertia. The loss of dancing is significant, as the novel has shown dancing to be central to Eddie's closest moments with others—his mother, Marguerite, and even Joe.

The Captain tells Eddie that the only protection he could offer his men was his mantra that nobody gets left behind. He then tells Eddie that he was the one who shot him. Eddie angrily launches at the captain, who lets Eddie wrestle him for a few moments. Eddie then mourns his leg, and the Captain tells him that he couldn't have convinced Eddie to leave, and he couldn't have let him die in front of the flaming hut, experiencing a mental breakdown, so he had to shoot him and pull him out of there. The Captain reveals that he himself didn't survive the combat zone. This surprises Eddie, who had assumed the Captain died in a later battle. Eddie then sees what happened: Morton tended to Eddie's wounds, and the Captain got out to move a gate in the way of their escape vehicle. After clearing the way and checking for enemies, the Captain stepped on a landmine and died.

Eddie's anger over everything he lost in the war—his leg, his sense of motivation, and his joy—has actually been building throughout his life. Eddie spent years mourning the loss of his leg and everything it symbolized, only to learn that the person who caused this loss was someone he trusted. What Eddie didn't realize during his life was that the injury to his leg spared him the loss of his life—which is ironic, given that Eddie's injury represents to him the loss of feeling *alive. Albom argues that sometimes, things aren't as bad as they appear, as the unknown alternatives would have been worse.*

CHAPTER 16

Eddie expresses his sadness that the Captain died so young, and his guilt that the Captain has been waiting for him in heaven for so long. The Captain explains that death only appears to be the end because life on Earth is all humans have known before they die. He likens it to how Adam, the first human, might have thought he was dying the first night he went to sleep, only to realize the next morning that life begins again each morning—except with the added benefit of also having his "yesterday." The difference between life on earth and in heaven, the Captain explains, is that in heaven "you get to make sense of your yesterday."

The Captain reframes the life versus death paradigm for Eddie. As Eddie's experiences thus far in heaven have confirmed, death is certainly not the end, but rather the start of another kind of existence. As is true throughout the novel, perception of reality is often misleading. Rather than bringing loss, death gives people more than they had in life: their "yesterdays." Death adds another layer of understanding, giving meaning to one's experiences on earth.

The Captain tells Eddie that he is there to teach him about the importance of sacrifice. He explains that sacrifice is something to "aspire to"—everyone makes sacrifices, and Eddie's mistake was to mourn his sacrifice. Eddie maintains that the Captain shouldn't have had to sacrifice his life, but the Captain contests that "when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're passing it onto someone else." The Captain tells Eddie that when he died helping his unit escape, he got to keep his promise to not leave anyone behind. Eddie thinks about this, and forgives the Captain for shooting his leg.

Just as the Blue Man's death spared Eddie's life, so too did the Captain's sacrifice prevent the possible deaths of his men—creating an important connection between the giver and the recipient of a sacrifice. Eddie forgives the captain and lets go of his bitterness because he realizes he isn't alone in having made sacrifices, and that others' sacrifices were often greater than his own.

Eddie remembers from the Blue Man that people waiting in heaven can make it look as they wish. He asks the Captain why he chose to make his heaven the battleground. The Captain explains that having grown up in a military family and gone straight to war, battle was the only life he knew. He then shows Eddie that their perceptions are different. While Eddie sees the decimated jungle from his wartime memories, the Captain sees the same land reconstructed—with beautiful, healthy trees and villages. As they prepare to part ways, Eddie asks the Captain if he knows whether Eddie saved "Amy or Annie" from the falling cart before he died. The Captain says he doesn't know. He then gives Eddie his old helmet with his old crushed-up photo of Marguerite inside, and Eddie's "heart aches."

Because Eddie hasn't yet come to terms with his experiences there, the battleground appears to him as it did when he was at war. The Captain, on the other hand, has already reconciled his memories, and is able to see it as a beautiful place. The contrast between the lush forest and the ruined battleground symbolizes the relationship between creation and destruction. The two are integrally related, and yet they are opposite, like two sides of the same coin. So too, life and death are part of the same cycle, but with two different faces. Humans throughout the novel (male ones, at least) are similarly multifaceted, and capable of having opposing characteristics.

CHAPTER 17

Back on earth, it is Monday morning at Ruby Pier. Dominguez has skipped breakfast and shows up at work in Maintenance. He and Willie stare at a newspaper on the desk with a front headline that says, "Amusement Park Tragedy." They briefly share that neither of them was able to sleep the night before. They sit and then fidget for a while, and the narrator explains that they are both "waiting for the old man to come in and get the workday started."

Though death is a natural part of life, Dominguez and Willie don't feel as if Eddie is truly gone. And because we see that Eddie is in heaven experiencing another kind of existence—they are right. Eddie wasn't as alone at the end of his life as he thought, because he left an empty space with the people around him.

CHAPTER 18

Another wind picks Eddie up, and he travels again through the colors of heaven. He travels through the stars, landing among the snow-capped mountains. He now feels heavy and slow, as he remembers feeling when he was middle-aged. He comes upon an old-fashioned diner, which he doesn't recognize. Looking in through a window, he sees people dressed in outfits from different decades, and many are badly wounded. To his shock, he notices his father among them. Eddie calls to him, but his father doesn't hear.

As Eddie passes through the phases of heaven, he continues to age. In this new place, it seems that Eddie's heavenly "lessons" are beginning to expand beyond his own feelings and experiences. Having seen the Blue Man's pain and the Captain's sacrifice, Eddie is now more disposed to empathize with the wounds of others.

CHAPTER 19

Eddie is recovering in a Veteran Affairs hospital, after being returned home from war. His mother, father, brother, Marguerite, and Mickey Shea come into his room with a cake, singing "Happy Birthday." Eddie wakes up to the sight and sound of his family coming in, and he screams when he realizes where he is. Eddie wishes they would leave, as he feels a sense of incredible darkness, but he tries to seem happy to have them. Everyone busies themselves, except for Eddie's father, who stands still. Eddie makes eye contact with him, but his father only looks away, which makes Eddie feel like crying.

One of the desires that motivated Eddie to go to war was his need to prove himself as a man—a desire likely inspired by his father. Yet, his father isn't even there to pick up the pieces of Eddie's attempt at bravery. Even in his darkest moments, Eddie's father fails to give him the emotional support and acknowledgment he craves. While everyone else tries to make life seem normal, Eddie's father withdraws.

CHAPTER 20

The narrator summarizes Eddie's memories of his parents. As a young child, Eddie tried to get his father's attention, but his father would either yell or ignore him. When he took Eddie out on Saturdays to Ruby Pier, he would find someone else to take care of Eddie while he drank and gambled. In contrast, Eddie's mother was loving and protective. When Eddie got a bit older, his father habitually came home drunk late at night, went into Eddie and Joe's room, and beat them with his belt, blaming his financial troubles on his kids. Eddie's mother tried to stop him, but to no avail. Still, Eddie loved his father when he was young, because as the narrator says, "sons will adore their fathers even through the worst behavior."

Eddie remembers his mother's devotion in caring for him, while he remembers his father for his violence and distance. His father represents stereotypically male behavior of violence and emotional absence, whereas his mother represents stereotypically female ideals of comfort and love—and indeed, both are rather flatly portrayed. Eddie's father's actions are active, whereas his mother is a passive bystander. As a child, Eddie naturally forgives his father, showing that male violence is normalized by the culture, with the effect that male brutality faces little social consequences.

At rare times, however, Eddie's father would give out small gestures of approval, and Eddie hungered for these moments, and eagerly sought them out. His father approved of Eddie when he played well in a baseball game, when he came home bloody from a fight and bragged that he was the winner, or when he defended his older brother from bullies. When Eddie was a teenager and he went to work with his father as a mechanic at Ruby Pier, his father would toss him broken equipment to fix. "It's fixed," Eddie would say, and his father would nod. Eddie's father spoke proudly of his maintenance work, and would say that Eddie's greasy mechanic's fingernails showed an "honest day's work." Eddie grew used to his father's lack of affection and learned to communicate wordlessly through these small rituals, not letting himself expect more.

Despite his father's cruelty, Eddie still desperately seeks his love. The strength of the human desire to be loved and to have a connection with family is so strong that it continues to seek small bits of affirmation even in the face of abuse. Eddie's father only rewards him for violence, athletic ability, hard work, and other symbols of masculinity. The irony is that Eddie's father also rewards him for fixing broken things, while he ignores the one thing that truly needs to be fixed—his relationship with his son. By expressing approval of Eddie's maintenance work, his father shows that he himself feels validated by Eddie following in his career path.

The narrative now shows Eddie after he has come back from the war. He is in a deeply depressed state, and spends most of his time on his parents' couch. One night his father come home drunk, and yells repeatedly at Eddie to "Get up and get a job!" When he tries to hit Eddie, Eddie reflexively lifts his arm against his father to block his father's strike. After that night, Eddie's father never speaks to him again—not even at Eddie's own wedding a couple years later. Throughout his life, whenever his mother or anyone else pleaded with his father to speak to him, Eddie's father told them that Eddie "raised a hand to him," a fact which he cannot forgive. Now, in heaven, Eddie is again filled with anger and hurt by his father's silence through the diner window.

Eddie's father is obsessed with maintaining control over his household, likely because he has so little control over other aspects of his life, such as his social status and finances. Though he contributed to making Eddie tough with violent reflexes, he is now unable to face the man he has turned his son into. So fragile is his pride, he would rather deny his son's existence than admit his lack of control over his son. To Eddie, who tolerated his father's physical abuse, this total denial of connection through silence is intolerable.

A woman wearing a long skirt and a parasol speaks to Eddie outside of the diner, and introduces herself as his "third person." She tells him his father isn't really there in the diner, because they are in *her* heaven. Eddie is frustrated that he is meeting a stranger, when he thought heaven meant being reunited with those he'd lost in his life, and finding peace. The lady tells Eddie that he must "make peace" on his own, and Eddie feels overwhelmed at this task. He remembers the fish he used to see flopping hopelessly in nets at Ruby Pier, and thinks of himself like that—feeling trapped and hopeless for all of his life after the war.

Eddie isn't interested in meeting strangers, because he hasn't yet fully internalized the Blue Man's lesson that all lives are connected. Eddie must learn all his lessons in heaven before he can fully understand each one individually. Eddie thinks of the helpless fish at Ruby Pier because he too feels helpless—even in heaven. To Eddie, things happen to him—he doesn't see himself as creating the situations or feelings he experiences.

The woman with the parasol tells Eddie that she knows him, even if he doesn't know her. She then tells him her story. She was once a young, pretty waitress at that very diner, right by the sea. She rejected the advance of many visiting men, until one day, when a handsome, rich businessman came to her diner. This man—Emile—took her to beautiful sea resorts and bought her extravagant things. When he proposed to her, he promised he would make a beautiful sea park in dedication to his love for her. He poured his energy into the massive project, and a few years later, he brought her blindfolded to the entrance of Ruby Pier. The woman now introduces herself to Eddie as Ruby.

As in the case of Marguerite and Eddie's mother, Ruby's story is based around the act of falling in love with a man and getting married. While Emile, like other men in the novel, has his own goals and pursuits apart from romance, Ruby's "life story" is entirely defined by her relationship to men—the men who futilely pursued her, as well as Emile. That one of the five people Eddie meets is the woman who inspired Ruby Pier highlights the importance of the park as a symbol in Eddie's life.

CHAPTER 21

Eddie is thirty-three years old today, and he wakes up sweating from a recurring nightmare: wandering through the flaming village in the Philippines, he hears a loud, constant scream. The sense of "darkness" stays with Eddie as he wakes, making him feel detached and unmotivated. He fears explaining this darkness to Marguerite, because he thinks she is "supposed to make him happy." That night, when Eddie returns from his work as a taxi driver, Marguerite is dressed up, and playing the record of their first love song, "You Made Me Love You." She has set out taffy with a white colored ribbon and cake, and she sings "Happy Birthday" and kisses Eddie. Eddie tries to fight his detachment so he can enjoy this moment with Marguerite. Then there is a knock at the door—a neighbor has come to tell them "something has happened" to Eddie's father.

Having been both the victim and the perpetrator of the darkest aspects of humanity, Eddie struggles to keep his ability to connect to other humans and to feel present in the calm of ordinary life. Just like during the war, Eddie's love for Marguerite is the only force anchoring him to reality and to his life. During the war, the thought of Marguerite compelled Eddie to fight to stay alive physically, while now, she moves him to stay alive spiritually. Eddie's sense of lethargy and detachment is also typical of clinical depression and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)—mental health issues that affect many veterans. All the important events of Eddie's life seem intimately connected to his birthdays.

CHAPTER 22

In heaven, Ruby continues telling Eddie her story. On one Fourth of July, some drunken workers accidentally set Ruby Pier on fire. Emile saw the entrance columns, marked by Ruby's name and picture, bursting into flames, and he ran in to "salvage his years of work." But the columns collapsed on him, and the park burnt to the ground. Emile and Ruby sold the ruined park, which was later rebuilt with the same name. Though they found a home away from the ocean and had three children, Emile was permanently crippled and depressed, and they had lost most of their money. Ruby cared diligently for Emile, and passed the years lamenting that Emile had ever built the park in the first place. Ruby then announces to Eddie that her purpose now is to tell Eddie how his father died.

Eddie has always aspired to greater means and achievement than he has found in his life at Ruby Pier. Yet the story of Emile and Ruby serves as a parable for how achievements and wealth can be easily lost—human structures and material gain can literally go up in flames. While Emile felt compelled to transform his love for Ruby into a physical monument, objects can never replace true devotion. Emile allows this loss to destroy his spirits, despite the fact that Ruby herself is still present, and the power Ruby Pier had for Emile was merely symbolic.

The story flashes back to the night of Eddie's thirty-third birthday. Eddie's father is in the hospital with pneumonia, which started a week before with a bad cough from a drunken night on the beach. Eddie's mother is deeply distressed, and she hardly ever leaves her husband's hospital room. Eddie and Marguerite spend all of their time taking care of his mother, while Eddie tries to help out financially by taking over his father's maintenance work each night after driving his taxi. In the hospital, Eddie's only communication with his barely conscious father is to show him the track grease on his hands from doing his maintenance work.

Despite his father's lifelong abuse, Eddie's loyalty compels him to temporarily let go of his anger in order to make the sacrifices needed to support his parents. His love for his mother further compels him, and his mother loves his father and relies on him financially—so to help his mother, Eddie has to help his father. Eddie's mother's attachment to her husband despite his violent character represents another stereotypically feminine ideal of unconditional devotion.

When Eddie's father finally dies from the pneumonia, Eddie only feels the "emptiest kind of anger." He had wished his father would die a more meaningful or heroic death to make up for the unsympathetic, mundane way he spent his life. Eddie goes to his father's house and rummages for something of his to keep. He takes a deck of playing cards with him.

Although Eddie deeply resents his father, he still sees himself in him, and Eddie's self-conception would be validated if his father had died a more heroic death. That he takes the deck of playing cards shows that he still wants a connection with his father, even after everything he has done to him—but the only thing he can think of as a suitable token is something representing gambling and drunkenness.

All through Eddie's life, he has tried to avoid the fate of working at Ruby Pier like his father. When Eddie was young and planned to go to engineering school, and later when he came back from the war and drove a taxi, his father mocked his disinterest in Ruby Pier, saying, "This ain't good enough for you?" After his father's death, Eddie's mother starts to lose touch with reality, and Eddie and Marguerite decide to move in with her. Eddie starts working full-time at Ruby Pier, because the park's proximity to his mother's apartment lets him look after her better. Despite all of his desires to create a different life for himself, he is doing the same job as his father—and he feels an immense sense of failure.

Destiny appears to be against Eddie, as he has always dreaded the possibility that he might live out his life at Ruby Pier, and yet that is exactly what he ends up doing. Eddie's hatred for his father further adds to his resentment of Ruby Pier—the park isn't just a symbol of stasis, but also a place associated with the one person who has hurt Eddie the most. Though he is stuck at Ruby Pier, however, Eddie's life isn't over. His relationships with his mother and Marguerite give him purpose and connection.

CHAPTER 23

Is it Eddie's thirty-seventh birthday, and he is having breakfast with his friend Noel, who works for the park dry-cleaning uniforms. Noel mentions a fatal accident in which a mother and child died at an amusement park in Brighton, and Eddie takes the story very seriously. He begins talking about all the potential safety hazards at Ruby Pier, and Noel chides that Eddie isn't very much fun, even on his birthday. The narrator comments that the darkness from the war still hangs over Eddie. Eddie continues thinking about the accident at Brighton. Noel invites him to the horse tracks that night, and Eddie thinks of Marguerite and hesitates—but then says yes anyway.

Eddie's sense of detachment—part of the darkness that lingered around him after the war—is challenged by his job at Ruby Pier. Though he resents having to stay at Ruby Pier, his reaction to Noel's story betrays that Eddie has also begun to deeply care about the people there. The violence Eddie witnessed in the war wasn't wasted on him, as it has created a strong sense of connection to all loss. Eddie feels a sense of responsibility for the safety of others, and a desire to prevent loss even for people he doesn't know.

CHAPTER 24

Ruby tells Eddie that his father wasn't as bad as he seemed. Ruby brings Eddie to a scene from the past. On a storming night, Mickey Shea is drunk and sobbing in the kitchen, and Eddie's mother tends to him. Mickey follows Eddie's mother into her bedroom, pushes her against a wall, and tries to touch her against her will. Eddie's father comes home, sees this, and Mickey runs out. After violently grabbing his crying wife and jerking her around, Eddie's father runs after Mickey and into the storm. He finds Mickey at the ocean, and the two men fall into the tide fighting. The water catches Mickey, and Eddie's father decides to rescue him. He pulls Mickey to safety. Exhausted and half-conscious, the two men lay on the stormy shore for hours before they can return.

Though Ruby wants to show Eddie's father in a redeeming light, his persistent cruelty is still evident—his wife is nearly raped, and his first reaction is to blame her and subject her to further violence. While his anger may be meant to signify his love and devotion for his wife, his reaction betrays otherwise. Likewise, Eddie's father's anger at Mickey doesn't stem from concern for his wife, but rather is a reaction to what he sees as an affront to his authority and possession over his family. Further, Mickey's actions attempt to undermine his masculinity, as defined by his sole claim to sexual relations with his wife.

Ruby explains that Eddie's father died from the pneumonia he caught on the beach the night he saved Mickey Shea. Eddie is shocked to learn about Mickey's attempt to rape his mother, and angrily says he would have let Mickey die after what he did. Ruby reminds Eddie that Mickey had done many kind things for Eddie's family over the years, such as getting his father his job at Ruby Pier, and giving the family money when Eddie was born and they were struggling. Ruby tells Eddie that his father was loyal to Mickey, and understood his alcoholism and ensuing failures in decision-making. She tells him that Mickey had lost his job that day, and was acting out of a sense of loneliness and pain. Ruby says Eddie's father's death was in sacrifice for a friend, which is a worthy reason to die.

Ruby wants to show Eddie that everyone is capable of falling short, and everyone deserves forgiveness. Pain causes people to hurt others, as Mickey's loneliness (supposedly) inspired his actions. The only characters portrayed with this complex combination of good and evil are male, however—Eddie's mother is shown only as the victim of violence. Further, there is no talk of Eddie's mother's feelings toward Mickey—it is as if the offence were only against Eddie's father. This further emphasizes Albom's portrayal of males as multi-faceted in moral dilemmas, and females as naturally forgiving.

Ruby reminds Eddie of how weak his father was in the hospital, and how he was unable to speak. She tells Eddie that his father didn't die in his sleep, as the nurses had said, but that he had died the night before while leaning out over the open window. Close to death, he regretted all of his mistakes and the pain he had caused those he loved. Though they were nowhere near, he called out the names of his wife, his sons, and Mickey. Then he died.

In the novel, death is necessary because it gives one perspective and makes one's life clearer—and this clarity then clears the path to redemption. Connections to others are all that remain at the end of Eddie's father's life, and this realization leads to his regret. Redemption is not granted by others, but found through sorrow, regret, and attempts to make things right.

Ruby tells Eddie she cares about him and his father because Eddie's father was sharing a hospital room with her husband, Emile. When Ruby learned that Eddie's father worked and had fallen ill at Ruby Pier, she felt as if she were responsible for the accident herself. She took a great interest in Eddie's father, and felt a strong connection to his family. The diner, Ruby explains, is from a time in her life when she was happy and life was safe and simple. Now, in heaven, she can keep all the souls of those who were hurt at Ruby Pier safe and warm, far from the ocean.

Ruby's choice to unite the souls of those hurt at the Pier demonstrates the connections forged by shared suffering. Ruby sees their pain as the consequence of unforeseeable causes and effects. She also associates the ocean with the danger of material ambition. Ruby's choice to make heaven a place to care for the damaged fits into the narrative of women as tasked with nurturing and fixing others.

Reflecting on the new details about his father's death, Eddie reminds Ruby again of how abusive his father was to him. Ruby tells Eddie she knows, but that Eddie's anger is only hurting himself. She tells Eddie he needs to forgive his father. Eddie tells her that his life was wasted at Ruby Pier because of his father, but Ruby tells him that isn't true, and that he will have to find out the real reason when he meets his next two people in heaven. Then Ruby walks away, and disappears.

While it is implied that Eddie's father's actions were redemptive, Ruby never directly states that Eddie's father deserved forgiveness. Indeed, the reminders of Eddie's father's violence only serve to reassert the gravity of his wrongs. Yet Ruby's final message is that anger is destructive, whereas forgiveness is the only path to true peace.

Left alone now, Eddie walks up to the diner window, and again watches his father sitting inside. Eddie's father still can't hear him, but Eddie speaks to him anyway. Eddie asks his father why he abused him so much, and tells him how much it hurt him. Then he tells his father his full life story. Eddie is now very emotional. He tells his father that it doesn't matter, because now he is choosing to drop his anger. Then he says, "It's fixed,"—the same phrase Eddie used to tell his father when he was young, every time he put together some broken piece of equipment his father had given him. Eddie then sees Ruby, now young and pretty, watching him from a distance. Then she disappears again into a sky the color of jade.

As he did throughout his youth, Eddie again "fixes" the broken thing his father has left him. The broken thing may be seen as Eddie's relationship with his father, or as Eddie's own damaged spirit. Throughout his childhood, Eddie sought responses from his father, and even in heaven, Eddie still doesn't fully know why his father hurt him so. But in this scene, his father's silence forces him to stop searching for answers. What heaven (or the implied God) thinks Eddie needs aren't answers, but the ability to forgive even when he doesn't have all the answers.

CHAPTER 25

On earth, nobody has come to the morgue to collect Eddie's few personal effects, including his wedding ring. The park employees have arranged a funeral for Eddie, paid for with his last unclaimed paycheck. They've chosen the nearest church so that all of the employees can go back to work after. Before the service, a priest asks Dominguez to tell him something about who Eddie was. Dominguez thinks carefully, and then tells the priest gently, "Eddie really loved his wife."

That the church is chosen for its nearness to Ruby Pier is ironic—even in death, Eddie can't get far from the park. Eddie's impersonal funeral and unclaimed effects make it seem like he died alone, but what Dominguez says about Eddie's love for his wife shows that he knows one of the truest, most tender things about Eddie—and this in turn shows that Eddie didn't die among strangers.

CHAPTER 26

Alone again, Eddie finds himself in a room with a row of doors. He realizes he is starting to feel old, and that he is aging as he passes through each stage of heaven. Suddenly, he finds himself at a wedding in another time, where everyone is speaking German or Swedish, and where he knows nobody. He walks out, and finds himself at a Spanish wedding, and then at an African wedding, and then several others of different eras and cultures. He remembers how much he disliked weddings in his life, because the dancing and festivities always reminded him of his bad leg. Eddie then finds himself at an Italian wedding, where a beautiful bridesmaid is passing out candied almonds, saying, "For the bitter and the sweet." As she approaches, Eddie recognizes her as a young Marguerite, and he falls to his knees.

Even though Eddie loved Marguerite, he hated weddings because they reminded him all of the things he lost in the war. While he focuses on his inability to dance, the loss of his leg's mobility also represents everything else he lost in the war—his sense of joy, his ability to celebrate, and his ability to fully experience love untouched by loss or darkness. The heaven of weddings around the world connects Eddie and Marguerite's love to the universal experience of love. But everything isn't perfect—as Marguerite's candied almonds symbolize, love is both bitter and sweet.

CHAPTER 27

It is Eddie's thirty-eighth birthday, and he is in the maintenance shop with his brother, Joe, who has a new job as a salesman, making good money. Eddie is rife with jealousy. Marguerite is working at the ticket booth now, and she comes in looking for Eddie. As always, he notices how beautiful she is. But he also feels embarrassed for Joe to see her working at the park. Marguerite insists Eddie come out, and when he does, a group of children are ready with cake and candles, shouting "Happy Birthday." Eddie is saddened to see how happy Marguerite is with children, given that she is infertile. He thinks of how she is researching adoption options, and of how optimistic she remains. As he blows out the candles with the kids, Marguerite takes a polaroid. The whole time, Eddie thinks only about her.

Eddie's shame that Marguerite has to work in the park betrays a gender norm of the era—a woman working is a sign of her husband's failure, rather than her own independence. Eddie and Marguerite look at the same situations with a completely opposite perspective: while Eddie feels heavy with sadness about Marguerite's work, his work, and their failure to have children, Marguerite stays light in her demeanor and outlook. Eddie's love for her is the only thing that brings him joy, and yet even love feels heavy because it reminds Eddie of all the unfulfilled wishes he has for Marguerite.

CHAPTER 28

Eddie is stunned to see Marguerite in heaven, and insists that it can't be her. He falls onto her shoulder, crying for the first time since he got to heaven. The novel then flashes back to Eddie and Marguerite's wedding. At a rented Chinese restaurant on Christmas Eve, they had a modest ceremony with foldable chairs and an accordion player. They walked home together afterward, holding hands. The narrator explains that with Marguerite, Eddie found a "deep but quiet love." After Marguerite died, he found nothing else to give shape to his life. In heaven, Eddie walks with Marguerite, as the two revel in every detail of each other's presence. She tells him she chose a heaven full of weddings because she loves the moment when a man and woman say their vows, when they believe so deeply in the power of their love.

Eddie and Marguerite's wedding is very humble, yet every detail of the event is significant because those details create memories full of life and meaning. However ordinary, their wedding is important because it is theirs. Their intent isn't to impress anyone, but to celebrate their togetherness—as evidenced by the scene of them walking home, holding hands. While Eddie's life encompasses many relationships and roles, Marguerite's choice to stay in a heaven of weddings makes it seem like her central defining role is as a wife.

Marguerite tells Eddie that she also met five people in heaven, and learned things, and that she has waited for him ever since then. She tells Eddie that she remembers everything that happened when they were together, but that she now knows why it all happened. Finally, she tells him that she knows he loves her, and Eddie feels a sense of "melting warmth." He begins to tell Marguerite all about the accident at Ruby Pier that caused his death. Eddie talks and talks, eager to tell her everything. Suddenly, he is overwhelmed by the reality that he is in heaven, with Marguerite. His emotions bursting, he tells Marguerite, "I missed you so much."

With Marguerite, Eddie doesn't need to give or seek forgiveness, as she indicates from the beginning that she has already resolved any difficulties between them through her own five encounters in heaven. As with Ruby and Eddie's mother, forgiveness is the default female virtue for Marguerite. Just as it did on earth, in heaven Marguerite's presence makes Eddie feel more alive. His words to Marguerite show that she is the person he has most been hoping to find.

CHAPTER 29

Eddie is at the horseracing track with Noel on his thirty-ninth birthday. Eddie bets again after every time he wins, trying to double his money. He calls Marguerite to tell her he is winning, but she is angry and yells at him. They are planning to adopt a child soon, and she says he needs to start being responsible. Eddie tells her not to tell him what to do, and slams down the phone. Marguerite decides to come to the racetrack to apologize to Eddie for yelling and to convince him to come home. On the overpass above the road, two drunken teenage boys are making a game of throwing glass bottles onto the cars below. One of them hits Marguerite's windshield, breaking it and sending her into a concrete divider. Her body is thrown and her liver lacerated. The two boys on the overpass scamper away.

Throughout the novel, life is full of unintended consequences. Eddie and other characters often cause harm unintentionally through small mistakes that spiral—in this case, Eddie's refusal to stop gambling starts a series of events that leads to Marguerite's accident. The argument between them is one of the only scenes in which a female character defends her position against a male character. Yet Marguerite is still depicted as the victim of male carelessness—both of Eddie's reckless gambling, and of the violent games of the teenage boys.

CHAPTER 30

After Marguerite's accident, she is hospitalized and then bed-ridden for six months. Because of the medical expenses and Marguerite's condition, the couple is unable to go through with the adoption. Marguerite and Eddie are disconnected for a while, because of Eddie's guilt and Marguerite's resentment. Eddie's friendship with Noel gradually ends, and he never returns to the racetrack. Over a few years, the couple's pain heals, and they begin talking and doing routine things together again. One day, they are sitting on the beach, when Eddie comments about how stunning Marguerite would look in a bikini. They are now in their mid-forties, and this comment means a lot to Marguerite, who again feels in love with her husband.

Romantic love is portrayed as a deeply resilient connection between humans. The love between Eddie and Marguerite is so strong that it can survive even the most traumatic tests. Love can go through bitter times, however, as Marguerite's offer of bittersweet almonds foreshadowed. For once, the sense of stasis in Eddie and Marguerite's lives affords them the opportunity to rebuild their love. Routines, rather than representing only the humdrum of life, allow Eddie and Marguerite a structure in which to find each other again.

A few years later, Marguerite is cooking in the kitchen when suddenly her hand freezes, she feels dizzy, and falls to the floor. It turns out she has a brain tumor. She goes through painful chemotherapy and radiation, but the cancer is too strong. Though she is only 47 years old, she goes home to spend her last days. Eddie makes a big dinner, and invites over all their friends and relatives. He pours extra wine for Marguerite, trying to make everything pleasant for her. Everyone acts as if it weren't a "farewell" celebration. A few days later, Marguerite wakes screaming, and Eddie drives her to the hospital. All the way, his senses are heightened, and all he can think of is trying to keep Marguerite. Looking up to the sky, Marguerite tells Eddie that she sees "home."

It isn't long after Eddie and Marguerite have reconciled when sickness takes her. Even when life is going well, death is always present as an inevitable, unpredictable threat. The dinner Eddie holds for Marguerite, while a "farewell party," is also a celebration of her life. Throughout the novel, Marguerite and Eddie's lives are marked by colorful celebrations of life: birthdays, his send-off party before the war, their wedding, and now her death. While Eddie is fixated on keeping Marguerite with him, she sees something more waiting for her after death—"home."

In heaven, all Eddie wants is time with Marguerite. They spend countless nights and days, talking and walking through Marguerite's world of weddings. Eddie tells her about his brother Joe's death, about his life working at the park, and about how the park has changed since they were young. He tells her about everyone he has met in heaven so far. He apologizes to Marguerite that he never built the life he imagined for them both outside of Ruby Pier. Marguerite asks Eddie what happened to him in the war, but Eddie still can't bring himself to talk about it. They lay together, not sleeping, and Eddie asks Marguerite if God knows he is there. She tells him he does, and Eddie realizes how much of his life he has spent thinking God wasn't paying attention to him.

This is the first time in the novel when God's role in Eddie's life is mentioned directly, though his existence and role in orchestrating events on earth and in heaven is implied throughout. Eddie has always wanted endless time with Marguerite. Romantic love, unlike other human connections, seems to be in the greatest conflict with the passage of time. Eddie's inability to talk to Marguerite about the war shows that he still has to process that experience before he can fully come to peace with his life.

CHAPTER 31

After a long time in heaven, Marguerite tells Eddie that she knows he was angry with her for dying. He eventually admits he was, because she was so young and he lost "the only woman [he] ever loved." She tells him, "lost love is still love." She tells him that his memories have kept their love alive, letting her feel his love even in heaven. Then Marguerite shows Eddie to the final wedding in heaven, where an accordion player is playing the song, "You Made Me Love You." Eddie realizes this is *their* wedding. Forgetting his embarrassment over his leg, he dances with Marguerite. He asks her to change her appearance to how she looked before she died, and though she is embarrassed, she does anyway. He tells her that he doesn't want their time to end. They dance a while, until she disappears from his arms.

Love forms so strong a connection that it transcends loss, continuing even through death. Memory doesn't need to be a sad thing, as memory is another kind of continuation of life. The little details of Eddie and Marguerite's humble wedding have enormous significance, as reliving these details brings back all their feelings of love for each other. It is as if hanging on to the details of little moments freezes them in time. Eddie's choice to dance with Marguerite despite his bad leg reinforces the symbolic barrier his leg represented—he could have danced anyway, but his real barriers were emotional.

CHAPTER 32

On earth, Dominguez is walking with a detached, hurried estate attorney into Eddie's apartment. Dominguez comments on how tidy Eddie kept his apartment, and thinks of how he misses Eddie. Back at the maintenance shop, nobody has even touched Eddie's things, as if they are all waiting for him to come back. Searching for things of value, Dominguez finds a box in Eddie's underwear drawer containing a deck of playing cards, a black bowtie, a Chinese restaurant menu, an army metal, and a polaroid of a man with children, blowing out birthday candles. The estate attorney finds Eddie's bank information. As they walk out, the attorney thinks happily of his own wealth in comparison to Eddie's, and of how much more he has to "show" than just a "tidy kitchen."

While the estate attorney thinks that all Eddie has to show for his life is a "tidy kitchen," the small, seemingly random items Dominguez finds in Eddie's drawer show that Eddie's life had much more value than anyone looking for material wealth could know. The items are all mementos from a life full of feeling and content—of pain, battle, love, and family. The significance isn't just in the items themselves, but in the fact that Eddie chose to keep them. Though Eddie wasn't wealthy in riches, after his death the things that remain are his relationships and experiences.

CHAPTER 33

Surrounded by silence and whiteness, Eddie misses Marguerite terribly. He feels nothing, and a long time passes in that empty place. He then begins to hear a loud shrieking sound, which he remembers from his recurring nightmare about the burning village in the Philippines. Eddie gets angry, remembering how the sound has haunted him through his life. Eventually, the whiteness turns into a river, where children are swimming and laughing. Eddie realizes the sound from his dreams wasn't screaming or pain, but the happy shrieking of playing children. The river is full of dark-skinned children, and no adults are there. On a hill, Eddie sees a young girl waving toward him. Suddenly, he finds himself standing in front of her.

Eddie's perception of things again turns out to be subjective, and influenced more by his own feelings than by reality. The nightmare screams that have haunted him all his life turn out to be (or are transformed in heaven to be) children laughing, showing Eddie's tendency towards pessimism. Eddie continues to see the destruction instead of the beauty underneath things, just as when he was with the Captain and saw the decimated version of the jungle, while the Captain saw it lush and regrown. The mysterious young girl echoes the girl Eddie died trying to save.

CHAPTER 34

It is Eddie's fifty-first birthday, his first birthday since Marguerite died. He remembers how much he hated his birthdays in the years after Marguerite's accident, but how she would still make him a cake, invite over friends, and give him a bag of taffy with a white ribbon. Eddie goes to work and then spends the night alone—it is an ordinary day. The novel then flashes to his sixtieth birthday, then his sixty-eighth, then his seventy-fifth—each spent alone or at work, without any celebration. On his eighty-second birthday, Eddie takes a taxi to the cemetery and visits the graves of his mother, brother, briefly his father, and finally Marguerite. He thinks of her, and of how even though it's bad for his teeth, he would eat taffy now "if it meant eating it with her."

Without Marguerite, time appears to pass meaninglessly for Eddie. Marguerite was at the center of all the celebrations in Eddie's life, and without her, even birthdays feel indistinguishable. Relationships, especially love, give shape to life. The small details of Eddie's life with Marguerite now represent all that he had and lost with her—like the bag of taffy with the white ribbon she gave him for every birthday. Eddie's work, which he once resented so deeply, is the only constant that remains after everyone he loves has died.

CHAPTER 35

In heaven, the little girl by the river introduces herself as Tala. She invites Eddie to sit with her on a mat. She tells him the Tagalog words for things around them, and explains that the children washing each other with stones in the river are imitating their mothers. Eddie is surprised by how direct and unafraid Tala is with him, unlike most children with adults they don't know. Tala notices the pipe cleaners in Eddie's jacket, and he makes her a little dog. She smiles, and then she tells him "You burn me."

It is significant that as Eddie nears the end of his journey, the last place he finds himself in is a world full of children. Free of the years of pain, shame, and regret of adults, children often symbolize peace and new beginnings. Being closer to birth, children are nearer to the frontier between life and death than adults, who may not be able to process the end because they can't remember the beginning.

Eddie is in shock, but asks her questions to find out what happened. In broken, childlike English, Tala tells him she was hiding from soldiers in a hut, because her mother told her to. Then she tells Eddie, "You make me fire." Shuddering, Eddie realizes Tala was the little shadow in the hut that he saw in the Philippines. All of his nightmares, the darkness he had felt for years—he realizes it came from this, the life he had taken from this beautiful child. He feels he deserves all of the sadness of his life. He begins to cry and scream a "howl from the very belly of his being." He cries, shaking, and repeats, "I killed you," and "What have I done." While Eddie cries, Tala calmly plays with the dog Eddie made her.

The one thing Eddie spent his life convincing himself didn't happen turns out to be real. The darkness that has haunted him suddenly makes sense—it wasn't just the violence of war, but the weight of having known somewhere deep in his soul that he had killed the child in the hut. His father's lessons of toughness, Mickey's lesson to "shoot and not think," and the mantras of the Captain—these all failed to prepare Eddie for this moment, when the human reality of the violence he has received and inflicted in his life suddenly washes over him.

Tala picks up a stone, and tells Eddie "You wash me." Reluctant and unsure, he follows her into the river. She takes off her blouse, showing horrible burns and blisters all over her body, and now they appear on her face as well. Shaking, Eddie scrubs the burns and blisters off of Tala, who relaxes and almost falls asleep. With her skin healthy again, Tala tells him she is his fifth person. Eddie starts to cry, and Tala asks him why he is sad. Letting go of the fact that she is a child, Eddie tells her he is sad because he didn't do anything with his life. Tala tells him he was "supposed to be there," at Ruby Pier. She tells him that by keeping the children safe, "You make good for me." Then she pokes him gently, and says "Eddie Main-ten-ance."

As with all transgressions throughout the novel, Eddie is provided a way to redemption. Tala asks him to wash away her burns, to symbolize his a chance to wash away her pain and cleanse himself of his sins. According to Tala, Eddie's work keeping Ruby Pier safe wasn't a waste after all, but was rather part of a divine plan providing him a way to absolve himself of his darkest mistake. When Tala calls Eddie by the name the children at Ruby Pier called him, it is almost chilling—they only just met, but it's as if she had been there all along.

Eddie knows now that he is coming to the end of this part of heaven, and he again remembers the little girl, "Amy or Annie," at Ruby Pier. He asks Tala if was able to pull her out of the way. Tala explains that he didn't pull, but pushed her out of the way, and saved her. Confused, Eddie says it isn't possible that he pushed her out of the way, because he felt her two small hands. Tala puts her hands in Eddie's, and then he realizes the truth. Tala tells Eddie that those were *her* hands he felt when he died, because she was the one who brought him to heaven.

All through his time in heaven, Eddie has been waiting to find out whether or not he saved the little girl—so he can know whether or not his death mattered. Though he did save the little girl, what gave his death meaning wasn't just that he died saving someone, but also that someone saved him *when he died. Tala, whom he took life from, chose to be the person to give him his second life —fulfilling an act of absolute forgiveness.*

The river now rises above Eddie, and all the children but Tala disappear. Eddie feels himself letting go of all the pain of his life. Guided by Tala's hand, Eddie is carried along the current through endless colors. He understands now that all of the colors he has floated and swam through in heaven are the "emotions of his life." Rising above the water, Eddie sees the beach at Ruby Pier full of thousands of families with children playing. He realizes that these are all the children, past, present and future, whom he had kept alive and safe by keeping Ruby Pier safe. He feels a sense of peace as he floats above the boardwalk. He then comes to the big Ferris wheel, where Marguerite is sitting and waiting for him. Eddie hears the voice of God say: "Home."

Eddie finally achieves peace once he understands his purpose as well as his pain. Eddie's range of positive and negative emotions has colored his life, and like the colors of heaven, these emotions are all equally beautiful and important. Far from being ordinary, his life has been deeply connected to countless people he saved without even knowing it. Though Eddie has long resented Ruby Pier, knowing his purpose there allows him to accept it as the setting for "home"—the place in heaven where he reunites with God and his wife.

CHAPTER 36 (EPILOGUE)

After Eddie's death, Ruby Pier stays closed for a week before re-opening. The ride that killed Eddie, Freddie's Free Fall, was closed for a season until it reopened with a new name—becoming a "badge of courage" for teenagers. Dominguez was given Eddie's job, and eventually put Eddie's things away into a trunk in the maintenance shop. Nicky, the boy whose car key had, unbeknownst to him, caused the accident, came back often the park—which, it turns out, was named for his great-grandmother, Ruby. In heaven, Eddie waits at the Stardust Band Shell for a little girl, "Amy or Annie," to live out her life and to one day come meet him and four other people. His lesson for her would be "that each affects the other, and the other affects the next, and the world is full of stories, but the stories are all one."

Life on earth continues, while also constantly transforming, as new young people come to the same places as their predecessors, giving those places new associations. Eddie's life was full of even more unexpected connections, such as his death being caused by Ruby's great-grandson. Further, by taking up Eddie's post at Ruby Pier after being the one to organize his affairs—just as Eddie did after his father's death—Dominguez came to represent a son-like figure to Eddie. The chain of connection between people and between birth and death continues, as Eddie waits in heaven for the little girl whose name he still can't remember. In the final lines Albom again emphasizes the central point of his novel—that all human lives are connected, and there is often a positive meaning even in seemingly random or negative events.

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